TEA MARKETING AND TEA TRADE POLITICS IN ENGLAND DURING THE 19TH CENTURY

Raktimjyoti Hazarika

Assistant Professor, Department of History, Jorhat College (Amalgamated),
Assam, India

ABSTRACT

Till the 16th century tea was herbal drink which was as only known to the People of China, Tibet, Magnolia, Thailand and Japan. But the European merchants introduced it to the global world and brought tremendous changes to its taste and flavour. Though the Asian leaf was quite unknown to England till the 17th century but within 200 years of its introduction, the Britishers not only adopted the so-called herbal drink but it became the national drink of England. Tea became one of the most debatable culinary practices in the Pre modern European society for its nutritional aspects. However, till 19th century, only the Chinese variety of tea was known to the tea drinking world and the Chinese traders and farmers began to sell inferior quality of tea products to the European traders. Thus, the tea adulteration issue not only changed the marketing strategy of the Europeans but also changed the political economy of many Asian colonies including India. So far most of the existing tea literature mostly deals with the botanical aspects and its agricultural growth. So, in this paper an attempt has been made to understand the transition of tea from merely a medicinal drink to the fashionable drink. It also highlights the nutritional factors and psychological propaganda related to tea that influenced the English society throughout the 18th and 19th century. It tries to understand the changing nature of the business of European traders with China. It also tries to highlight how adulteration propaganda against the Chinese tea products helped in the emergence of tea markets in the British colonies.

Key words: Adulteration, China, England, Market, Nutrition, Tea.

Cite this Article: Raktimjyoti Hazarika, Tea Marketing and Tea Trade Politics in England during the 19th Century, *International Journal of Management*, 11(12), 2020, pp. 575-580.
<http://iaeme.com/Home/issue/IJM?Volume=11&Issue=12>

1. INTRODUCTION

Tea was originated in China from where it spread to Japan, Korea and Thailand. Actually, tea belongs to the *Camellia* genus which has two varieties on the basis of their origin. The Chinese variety of tea is known as '*Camellia sinensis*', a native plant of South western China

from where it spread to Central China, Japan and Korea 1200-2000 years ago[1] . The early Chinese literature on tea was mostly dealt with its botanical and medicinal qualities (Van Driem, 2019). From China, the Portuguese and the Dutch merchants introduced Tea to the Europeans and soon it became popular in western and Northern Europe. It was normally held that in England tea was first introduced by Catharine of Braganza of Portugal When a marriage treaty was signed in 1661 between England and Portugal However tea was procurable in London [2] in 1660-61 before the arrival of Catharine in England. The Dutch sources reveals that tea was introduced in England for the first time in between 1652 to 1654 [3] and till 1699 it was imported from Dutch merchants to England[4]. From the beginning of the seventeenth century, Netherland (formally Holland) and Portugal were the chief importer of tea to European markets from the tea homelands [5] of Asia. From the very beginning it was the ladies who played a vital role not only in introducing tea to the different sections of the society but also gave England a tea culture. Tea parties and tea shops became the favourite place for the lady's groups to share their secrets and among themselves (Rappaport, 2019). That's why during the Victorian age when tea planation grew and tea became the national drink of England, women were depicted as the prime consumer of tea no matter men drank tea equally. But during the early modern era, food adulteration in international business became an area of concern for the traders and the consumers (Sinclair, 1818). In this paper an attempt has been made to trace the expansion of tea market in Europe, more specially in England. It also tries to understand the impact of tea adulteration in the changing marketing scenario of international tea business.

There were various reasons why the demand for tea kept rising in the European markets within a short period of time from its introduction. The prime reason was its medicinal and nutritional values. Earlier tea was introduced to the Europeans as a herbal drink with lots of medicinal benefits. Even in England tea was regarded as best herbs brought by Queen Catharine in the 17th century [6] which was reflected in the lines of poem written by Edmund Waller. Under the influence of Dutch physicians who constantly did experiments on tea, the English physicians too claimed that tea was a valuable addition to solid foods which helped in digestion by diluting the solid foods without any cream, quickens the memory and fancy [7]. Tea was useful in cases of indigestion, surfeit and was frequently drank with advantage in colds, coughs, rheumatisms, headaches etc [8]. Besides these, Europeans began to prefer tea to fermented liquors from the second decades of the 18th century. Thus Herman Boerhaave, a professor of medicine, botany and chemistry at Leiden University in the early 18th century wrote in favour of tea, "Can you produce an instance of men taking so cordially to any other liquor, not of an intoxicating quality" [9] John Sinclair while describing the English life style of the 19th century said that the introduction of tea promoted sobriety among the elite and middle class people of the English society which diverted many high ranked English gentlemen towards the drawing room from wasting their times at the liquor parlours with their alcoholic partners [10]. Even Herman Boerhaave described that there was no sociable meal other than tea for the English people in comparison to milk porridge, gruel, broth, coca, sugar, honey , lemonade and coffee [11].

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this paper is to make a historical study on the perception of the Europeans regarding the nutritional aspects of Tea. It also tries to understand the importance of food adulteration in global business. It also tries to highlight how tea changed the marketing strategy of the British merchants against the Chinse monopoly over tea trade.

3. METHODOLOGY

The approach of this research is historical and exploratory in nature. Both conventional and analytical methods of research are followed to achieve the objective. In this regard both the primary and secondary sources like monographs, edited books, existing biographies, books, journals etc. are taken into consideration.

4. TEA ADULTERATION AND THE CHANGING MARKETING STRATEGY IN INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS

England was the major importer of tea in Europe. However, in the 17th century the British East India Company of England had no direct trade relation with China [12] for which tea was imported from China through the Dutch merchants which made the exotic herbal drink an expensive one. Probably due to the high price of the imported Chinese tea, it was at first considered as an elite luxury drink, only confined to the royal and elite class of the society. Till the first half of the 18th century tea was mainly confined among the ruling and aristocratic class due to the heavy taxation upon the Asian leaf. Besides these on average, the consumers had to spend five pence a day or 7 pounds 12 shillings per annum in till the end of the 18th century England. So many scholars and physicians of that time advised the common or poorer section of the society to spend such a sum on other nourishing foods other than tea which would be much more beneficial to the poorer or working-class families [13]. However, with the gradual foothold in Anglo Chinese trade the British East Company began to import tea directly from China without any intermediaries resulted in price fall of teas. With the discovery of Assam Tea (genuine tea plant indigenous to Upper Assam that was different from Chinese tea) [14] in 1823-24, the tea from India could be easily exported to England. So, the tea that was earlier imported from China was replaced by the teas from Assam, Darjeeling and Ceylon (Sri Lanka) in the 19th century and made England the habitual drinkers of tea. From 1880s onwards the tea produced in Assam gradually became popular which clear from the fact that in 1884 the import of teas from India and Sri Lanka was greater than the Chinese tea [15]. The Adulterated tea from China that was imported from China was one of the factor for the shift of the British consumers from *Camellia Sinensis* (Chinese tea) to *Camellia Assamica* (tea produced in Assam and Meghalaya) as a moral outrage during the Victorian age. From 18th century several reports confirmed about the adulterations of imported teas from China [16]. It was reported that the Chinese turned low quality Black Tea into Green Tea by using Prussian blue, an iron salt which could be injurious to health for which Chinese Green Tea was termed as ‘Slow poison’ by many food scientists and adulteration officers of that time (1814-1870) [17]. During the Victorian age, an assumption based on racial prejudice became prominent in projecting the Chinese as dishonest people to explain the adulteration of Chinese teas from the first half of the 19th century. Though adulteration and food smuggling became quite common in world trade market from the last two decades of the 18th century but the British propaganda against the Chinese Black or Green Tea helped in the slow penetration of Indian tea in the British colonies and later on in England. From the third decade of 19th century the Anglo -American propaganda created panic among the public by highlighting how Chinese Green Tea degraded the Physical and mental condition of the western consumers [18]. Though the British enjoyed the ‘open Door Policy’ yet the tea from China was considered foreign due to the fact that only the Chinese had the access to the tea gardens directly. For which The Britishers could not able to lower the cost of tea. The import of Chinese tea was increased from 44 million pounds in 1835 to 86 million pounds in 1856 which resulted in trade deficit for England. The increasing trade deficits made England so much panic that it was the tea factor that led to the second opium war in China. So, the allegations of tea adulteration against China was presented in such an exaggerated and bias

ways [19] in English media to convince the tea consumers of England that the Chinese tea was nothing but a mixture of dust and the alternative was the so called British tea that was cultivated in Assam and Darjeeling from 1830s [20]. So the concept of foreign tea (Chinese tea) and Imperial of National tea (British or Indian tea) played a dominant role in diverting the taste of the Britishers from Chinese tea to Indian teas. While the tea produced in Assam and Darjeeling was considered as 'British' due to the fact that the tea plantation was done by the British capitalist under the supervision of the British authority in a British colony. The British took pride in presenting Assam Tea (that was completely produced under the guidance and control of the British authorities) at Great London Exhibition, the world's first International Trade fair in 1851 [21]. This belongingness and the flavour of Indian black tea made in Assam played a vital role in shifting the attraction of the consumers from Chinese tea to the teas of Assam and Darjeeling which was less expensive also in comparison to the Chinese tea [22].

5. TEA AND ITS IMPACT ON SUGAR MARKET

Originally tea was taken as a medicine without milk and rarely the Dutchmen used milk and sugar. Even at China, tea was used in only with boiled water and sometimes a small amount of salt or sugar was added there to get electrolyte as per the directions of traditional Chinese culture. Dutch physician and botanist Willem Ten Rhijne mentioned that though tea with sugar was not a common practice among the Chinese but the Europeans adopted the tea milk combination from the Chinese [23]. According to a survey held in 1744, 12-15 pounds of sugar were used to drink every pound of tea in England [24]. The addition of milk and sugar brought some protein and some calories into the drink which made it useful even among the working-class people. The British popularized the taste of tea by copying the French tea drinking tradition with milk [25]. The Englishmen became so much accustomed to sugar tea that in 1750, a famous Dutch treaties on tea named 'De Potu Theae' had to be translated to English to influence to English ladies to reduce the excessive usage of sugar in tea [26]. However, such suggestions had little impact upon the English people. French Duke Rochefoucauld observed that sweat tea was common among the all section of the English society in the 18th century in spite of the taxation upon tea and growing prices of sugar and molasses [27]. The annual per capita consumption of sugar was increased from 4lbs in 1700 to 18 lbs in 1800 in England which clearly indicates the growing popularity of sweat tea in England [28]. George L. van Driem in his book "The Tale of Tea" mentions that the famous English phrase (developed during the 19th century) 'A nice cup of tea' refers to Indian tea with sugar and milk [29]. The British used tea with milk sugar and some sort of spices which made the recipe of British Tea or Indian Tea more refreshing. While the usage sugar in tea reduced the bitterness of the leaves and the milk was used to get soften the taste and to provide nourishment. Again, the increasing profit of sugar trade from the new world also adversely had impact upon the changing taste for tea in Europe. Though French, Spanish, Dutch companies were involved in sugar trade, it was the British who earned enormous profit through the sugar production in their colonies and for the sugar market they need a large numbers of permanent consumers. The quest for sugar market was solved by tea [30].

6. CONCLUSION

The history of tea is very Fascinating. It was quite familiar to China from the 3rd millennium B.C.E. from there it spread to Japan, Korea and Thailand. The Europeans came to know about tea only during the 14-15th century with their extensive trade with China through silk trade route. The Dutch merchants brought tea to Europe and from them it entered France, Russia, England. With the entry of queen Catherine of Portugal tea became a fashionable drink at Royal courts. Catherine played a vital role in formulating tea time and tea culture in early

modern England and in 19th century England came to be known as ‘Tea Drinking nation.’ Though the Asian leaf was quite unknown to England till 17th century, within 200 years of its introduction, the Britishers not only adopted the so-called herbal drink but also played a vital role in projecting tea as a delicate, floured refreshment drink by introducing some new flavours of tea to all over the world. The British style of mixing sugar, milk, honey, ginger and other spices with not only made it an energetic delicious blended drink but also such inclusion also proved more healthier than its original raw version. In this way tea trade helped in the growing market for sugar and honey in Europe. The growing demand for tea also changed the nature of commercial transaction between England (the major importer of tea) and China (the major distributor of tea) . The Chinese market policy of not allowing any Europeans into the tea gardens of China and the the growing acquisition of the European traders against the Chinese distributors brought revolutionary change in the marketing strategy of international tea business. Besides to counter the increasing trade deficits, the allegations of tea adulteration against China was presented in more exaggerative ways. The anti Chinse racial conception was also formulated in and around tea during the Victorian age which ultimately led to growth of demand for teas produced in Assam and Darjeeling in the world tea market. The starting of tea planation in the British colonies of Britain in Asia and Africa made England the ‘queen of world tea trade’.

REFERENCES

- [1] Nair, K. P. Prabhakaran, The Agronomy and Economy of Important Tree Crops of the Developing World, Elsevier, London, 2010, p275
- [2] Strickland, Agnes, Lives of the Queens of England: From the Norman Conquest, Volume 5, London, ,1845, p521
- [3] Hood, Karen Jean Matsko, Tea Time Delights Cookbook: A Collection of Tea Time Recipes, Washington, 2014, p28
- [4] Driem, George L. van, The Tale of Tea: A Comprehensive History of Tea from Prehistoric Times to the Present day, Boston, 2019, p433
- [5] Driem, op.cit., p11
- [6] Strickland, op.cit, p521
- [7] Sinclair, Sir John, The Code of Health and Longevity , London, 1818, p84
- [8] Ibid, p78
- [9] Ibid, p77
- [10] Ibid, p78
- [11] Ibid, p79
- [12] Ibid, p19
- [13] Sincliar, op.cit, p81
- [14] Griffith, William, Report on the Tea Plant of Upper Assam. With maps, India, ,1838, p1
- [15] Ibid, p683

- [16] Judith L. Fisher, "Tea and Food Adulteration, 1834-75"
- [17] Rappaport, Erika, A Thirst for Empire, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 2019, p131
- [18] Ibid, p131
- [19] Ibid, p129
- [20] Hazarika, Raktimjyoti , Development of hotels and restaurants in colonial Assam: A brief historical Study, Pragyanjyoti, (ISSN : 2348-9626), vol ii,2017, p45
- [21] Campbell, Dawn, The Tea Book, Grenta, 1995, p33
- [22] Hazarika, Raktimjyoti , Autobiographies as a source of food and culinary history of colonial Assam, Assam, 2017, p156
- [23] Ibid, p432
- [24] Ibid, p434
- [25] Driem, op.cit., p436
- [26] Driem, op.cit., p435
- [27] Ibid, p435
- [28] Ibid, p434
- [29] Ibid, p695
- [30] Michelle Comins& Rob Comins, (2019), Tales of the Tea Trade: The secret to sourcing and enjoying the world's Favourite Drink, Lewiston , 89