

# Early history of tea plantation in Assam and Sri Lanka: An antiquarian approach

*Anura Manatunga<sup>1</sup>*

## **Abstract**

Tea is the most prolific item of the shared heritage of Assam and Sri Lanka. The tea plant is indigenous to Assam where it grows in wild and is used as a drink by locals from time immemorial. However, the cultivation of tea in Assam as a Cash Crop was initiated by the British in 1830's with the help of Chinese expertise. They formed the Assam Tea Company in 1839 which is the first Indian company that dealt with tea manufacturing and exportation. Tea seeds were introduced to Sri Lanka, then Ceylon from Assam in 1839 and planted in Peradeniya Botanical Gardens as an experiment along with some plants from Botanical Gardens of Calcutta. The first tea estate in Sri Lanka was initiated in 1867 at Loolecondera near Kandy. During the next few decades, tea cultivation developed as the main export item of Sri Lanka replacing coffee which died due to a leaf disease. In 1900, there was approximately 380,000 acres of land under tea plantation in Sri Lanka mainly in the Central Highlands of the Island. The present research is an antiquarian approach into the early history of tea plantation in Assam and Sri Lanka in a comparative perspective. Deforestation of virgin tropical forests, recruitment of labour force, techniques of plantation, early machinery and factories, transportation, export and several other aspects of tea plantation in Assam and Sri Lanka will be surveyed in this research.

**Keywords:** *Antiquarian approach, Assam, Ceylon, Sri Lanka, Tea, Nineteenth Century*

---

<sup>1</sup> am@kln.ac.lk