

Tea, or *Camellia Sinensis*, as it is scientifically known, originated in China. Legend has it that, tea leaves accidentally blew into the boiling water being prepared for the Emperor somewhere in the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE. He liked the brew. And, 'Tea' was born, the most popular beverage in the world. Second only to water. Incidentally, China is also the largest producer of Tea in the world.

Tea was planted in India by the British during the days of the Raj, primarily in Assam and in the southern Sahyadri ranges. Actually tea is a plant that grows into a tree. In tea gardens, the tea that we see are shrubs because they are regularly trimmed. The tea plantations in India are very old. Some more than a 100 years. Tea plant becomes mature and ready to harvest by around the 5<sup>th</sup> year of planting. The harvesting of leaves can go on till the plant is replaced. 50 to 70 years is said to be the time for replacement of the tea. Silver Oaks are planted in tea gardens to provide some shade in dry months and the leaves shed by the tree serve as nutrient rich mulch for the tea plant.

The types of teas produced are black tea, oolong tea, green tea and white tea. Apart from this there are variations like pu-erh tea, yellow tea etc. Assam black tea is known locally as 'laal chai' because of the deep red colour of brew. Other tea like Chamomile tea, Hibiscus tea, Jasmine tea, Rose tea etc are not tea in the traditional sense. They are made from leaves of other plants or by using additives in tea. Tea made using only tea leaves are called True Tea.

Although, tea can grow in tropical and sub tropical climates, major tea producing countries are India, China, Sri Lanka, Kenya and southeast Asian countries. In India, tea is grown in Assam, Kerala, Tamilnadu, Karnataka, Sikkim, Tripura, West Bengal, Himachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh. Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Kerala being the major producing states in that order. Dargeeling tea and Nilgiri tea are the finest tea around the world.

Tea production is largely seasonal in most parts. This is because the tea plant lies dormant in winter and growth spurts in rainfall and summer. Ideal temperature is 16 to 32 degree celsius. Therefore tea price increases in November to March in India due to increased demand and reduced production. There are basically 2 categories of tea based on production methods. They are CTC tea and Orthodox tea. CTC stands for Crush Tear and Curl (or also Cut Tear and Curl). Tea are produced by processes of withering, cutting, rolling , oxidising(fermenting), firing /drying and sorting. CTC teas are machine produced with minimal human intervention. This also results in faster production. Orthodox tea are produced using traditional methods with more human intervention and minimal use of machines. This is more time consuming. It is said that orthodox tea retain more of the original characteristics and flavours of tea. The highest produced and consumed tea in the world is CTC teas. In India most of the orthodox teas are for export.

Fermentation in teas range from fully fermented to unfermented tea. Black teas are fully fermented while Oolong teas, Yellow tea etc are partially fermented to different levels. Green tea is representative of unfermented tea. Firing is done to end the fermentation process. Fermentation affects the appearance, aroma, colour, flavour, liquor etc in the tea. Fermentation also affects the caffeine content of tea to some extent. Tea leaves naturally have 2-5% caffeine. Fully fermented teas usually have the most caffeine content.

The sub category of tea is Dust tea and Leaf tea. Tea is sorted to different grades based on size of granules. Dust tea is tea that is powdered and graded like Super Fine Dust(SFD), Super Red Dust(SRD), Fine Dust(FD), Red Dust(RD), Pekoe Dust(PD) etc in India based on the size of the tea particle. Leaf tea appear as granular rolled leaves, partially cut leaves to whole leafs. Production in South India is mostly dust grades as it is popular here. Only 25% of production in Assam and West Bengal are dust grades.

Tea trade in India is controlled and regulated by The Tea Board of India formed under the Ministry of Agriculture. The Tea Board was formed in 1954 and Head Quartered in Kolkata. Tea board is now under the Ministry of Commerce. It is stipulated that atleast 50 % of the teas produced in India should be sold through Tea Board Auctions, although, this not fully complied with at all times.

Supplyco purchases tea mainly through online Tea board auctions. This is an online auction platform created by NSEIT. Tea auctions are conducted in Cochin, Coimbatore, Coonoor, Kolkata, Guwahati and Siliguri. Supplyco is a licenced buyer in tea auctions and purchases tea in any of these centres according to requirement. Maximum purchase is done in Cochin as good dust grades are available in Cochin auctions and on consideration of transportation costs. When tea leaf is required Supplyco participates in Coonoor and Guwahati auctions as better leaf grades are available there. Assam tea is valued around the world for its deep red colour and strength.

India produces some of the finest tea in the world. India is the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest tea producing countries in the world. India produced 1374.97 million kg in FY2022-23. Assam alone producing 50% of this. South India accounts for about 20% of the production. Being also among the largest consumer of tea, only around 20% is available for export. But India is still the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest tea exporters in the world with around 12% share in total exports. Black tea forming 96% of those. Biggest export destinations for India has traditionally been Iran, Russia and the UAE. UAE was the largest importer of Indian tea in 2022-23. Major importer of Assam tea is United Kingdom.

Auctions are conducted every week in auction centres with different days of the week in each auction centre. Around 2000 to 2500 lots are placed in the Cochin auction. These lot samples are collected from approved tea brokers and tasted based on which, suitable lots are selected for purchase. Tea purchased in the

auction is brought from seller warehouses in Willingdon Island to Supplyco warehouse in Chullickal. Supplyco processes tea in its blending unit at Kochi and packs it to different Sabari brand labels. Packaging is done in plastic pouches, jars and duplex cartons. The Sabari brands currently in production are Sabari Gold, Sabari Hotel Blend, Sabari Super fine dust, Sabari leaf tea, Sabari Green Tea and Sabari Supreme loose tea.

Quality test of tea is done in several stages. More and more tea gardens are being certified with prestigious international certification Rainforest Alliance(RA) or/and Indian Trust Tea. The certification measures a wide set of parameters like pesticide use , fertiliser use, pesticide residue, hygiene, soil conservation, water conservation, deforestation, livelihood, remunerative wages to workers etc.From factory level, all lots placed for auction are pretested by the seller. The tea broker is required to do testing of lots under his brokerage firm once in three months. Tea board does comprehensive tests on random lots apart from factory visits. Supplyco tastes the tea by expert tasters for drinking quality like taste, aroma, flavour, cutting, liquor thickness and various other parameters. In addition to this, the tea is selected at random and sent to testing every month at tea board approved laboratories by Supplyco. Random testing of tea is also done by Supplyco quality control division drawing samples from outlets. Supplyco warehouse is approved by The Tea Board for safety and clean storage of tea.