Directory of Tea Superconnectors

AFFILIATION

Principal Officer & Secretary, Tea Research Association of India

NAME

Joydeep Phukan

EMAIL

joyphukan@gmail.com

PROFILE PHOTO

- JPHUKAN.jpg

HERE IS WHAT MOST INTERESTS ME IN TEA...

I come from a family in Assam that has been actively involved in tea cultivation for more than 100 years. My maternal great-grandfather, Someswar Sarma, worked at Moabund Tea Co. (under George Williamson & Co., UK) as their first Indian manager. Upon his retirement in 1895, he was gifted a tea estate by his employers—Oating Tea Estate—in recognition of his extraordinary contributions to tea cultivation in the forests of Assam. By the time he passed away in 1910, he had expanded his holdings to 21 tea estates. Visiting family estates and listening to stories about the early days of tea cultivation have always fascinated me and deepened my passion for tea.

I joined the tea industry in 1999 with the Indian Tea Association, which allowed me to witness the industry up close. The tea sector in Eastern India (Assam and West Bengal) is one of the most vibrant and disciplined industries, employing over a million people while ensuring gender equity in one of the most underdeveloped regions of India. Covering more than 500,000 hectares of land in Northeast India, the industry provides a vast green cover of tea bushes and shade trees, silently contributing to environmental sustainability.

The workers of the Indian tea industry have been its backbone for the last two centuries, and they will continue to be so. I sincerely believe that if tea producers and farmers can earn well from their produce, workers should receive a greater share of these increased earnings.

The introduction of electronic auctions tempted me to join the Guwahati Tea Auction Centre in 2003, where I was able to witness the brilliance of the tea auction system in fair price discovery. I firmly believe that with the necessary reforms, the tea auction system remains one of the best mechanisms for price discovery in the industry.

Life has come full circle for me since joining the Tea Research Association of India, popularly

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known as TRA Tocklai. Established in 1911, TRA Tocklai has played a pivotal role in making tea an economically viable crop in India. I consider myself fortunate to be part of an organization that has contributed immensely to the evolution of commercial tea cultivation in India over the past 115 years.

It is magical to step into a tea factory and breathe in the aroma of fresh tea leaves as they are being processed. I have always wished that the fresh scent of tea leaves found in factories could be replicated in brewed tea—if that happens, there would be no turning back for this timeless beverage, which has been cherished for over 2,000 years.

One of the high points in my tea journey was when I proposed the idea of International Tea Day on October 16, 2015, during the FAO Intersessional meeting at the Milan Expo Grounds. This vision ultimately became a reality in September 2019 after the United Nations General Assembly approved it. Countries including China, Sri Lanka, Canada, the USA, Kenya, Japan, and the UK worked together as a team to make this initiative a success.

CLIMATE CHANGE & EXTREME WEATHER EVENTS

Changing weather patterns leading to climate change tops the list of threats for the global tea industry. I sincerely feel that apart from working with International and National agencies, the global tea industry needs to form a Task Force to combat the threats arsing out of climate change which manifests differently in different tea growing regions.

RISING PRODUCTION COSTS & LABOR SHORTAGES

The cost of wages for tea workforce is increasing and will further increase. The wages form more than 50% of the cost of tea production. Rising production costs with unremunerative tea prices is a big concern.

CHANGING CONSUMER PREFERENCES & MARKET TRENDS

Changing consumer preferences amongst GenZ and Gen Alpha is another big concern. There is an urgent need to resposition tea speaking about all the positive attributes it has on wellness, wholeness and environmental sustainability.

COMPETITION FROM ALTERNATIVE TEA SOURCES & SYNTHETIC SUBSTITUTES

The use of the word tea has done well for herbals and similar products. A deeper consumer understanding on their preferences is required.

REGULATORY & CERTIFICATION CHALLENGES

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In most tea producing countries there are end number of National regulations. Certification has increased the challenges and costs in a big way. New generation cosnumers would be quick to find out the major lapses in the global certification system. Need for a complete overhaul.

TECHNOLOGICAL DISRUPTIONS IN RETAIL AND WHOLESALE ECOMMERCE (DTC, B2B, DIGITAL MARKETPLACES, INTERNET AUCTIONS)

One needs major technological disruption in the way tea is sold through retail and eComm. QSR gives the opportunity to try new sales and promotion format.

LEGAL, GOVERNMENT LIAISON, ADVOCACY, LEGISLATIVE EXPERTISE

There is a lack of strong global advocacy / pressure group to highlight global tea industry issues.

MY MAIN INTERESTS

- Educating consumers about tea's cultural significance, health benefits, traditions, history.
- Facilitating the exchange of best practices among growers, traders, and researchers.
- Leveraging digital technologies, including blockchain and artificial intelligence, to enhance transparency and efficiency.
- Mechanical expertise in mechanization, equipment selection and maintenance and field and factory operations.
- Marketing, brand building, practical experience in retail and wholesale, import and export and logistics.
- Advocacy, legal, legislative

MY TRAINING AND EDUCATION (LINKEDIN PROFILE OR WEBSITE URL)

https://www.linkedin.com/in/joydeep-phukan-6b4bb414/

CONTACT EMAIL

joyphukan@gmail.com

PHONE

+919831093713

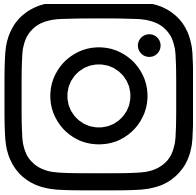
OPTIONAL: UPLOAD AN EXAMPLE OF COLLABORATIONS THAT DEMONSTRATE YOUR ROLE AS FACILITATOR.

- The-Assam-Tribune-21st-May-2023.jpeg

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