

A Lasting Legacy For Ceylon Tea

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The Triple Golden Jubilee of Ceylon Tea will be forever etched in history, thanks to a monumental book and sterling silver memorabilia crafted for the occasion.

Words Yomal Senerath-Yapa

Photography Vishwathan Tharmakulasingham and Geeth Viduranga

The auditorium at BMICH was brimming with the very cream of the tea trade to celebrate one of the grandest events that would mark the 150th anniversary of Ceylon Tea. It was a two-fold celebration, that involved the launch of a magnificent book on Ceylon Tea and a grand charity auction. The Chief Guest for the occasion was Navin Dissanayake, Minister of Plantation Industries.

The book, titled 'Ceylon Tea: the Trade that Made a Nation', was a lush coffee table volume produced together by photographer Dominic Sansoni and writer Richard Simon.

Anselm Perera, Chairman, Colombo Tea Traders' Association, introduced the celebratory book as an outstanding literary creation, and a reference source of great value for posterity. He called it, "a comprehensive and readable history of the Island's plantation industry, the auction system and the export trade from beginnings to present date." Rohan Pethiyagoda, Chairman, Sri Lanka Tea Board, also delivered a highly memorable speech.

After the maiden copies of the book were presented, the photographer and the author were each presented with a specially crafted, personalised porcelain tea set. Parts of the book in Richard Simon's captivating prose were read out to a rapt audience. The descriptions, while recording fact, managed to convey a sense of magic and mystery within the trade, which glues the reader to the narrative.

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It was an appropriate occasion to go back to the roots and following the reading of extracts the limelight fell on Loolecondera, the first tea plantation in Sri Lanka, where tea is still being produced from the first seeds planted 150 years ago. The employees of Loolecondera estate, the manager and five tea pluckers, were invited on stage, where they were honoured and given a standing ovation.

The second segment of the event was the "Sesquicentennial Grand Charity Auction", where exquisite Ceylon Tea memorabilia, all of them in sterling silver, went under the hammer. Altogether 49 items were auctioned. With eight brokers, each auctioning a set of six items individually while John Keells, as the broker with the longest history, had the privilege of auctioning an additional decorative tea chest.

A specially crafted gavel was used, decorated with sterling silver and inscribed with the date of the auction. The bidding happened to a high feverish tempo. A beautiful miniature bust of James Taylor, the “Father of Ceylon Tea” was sold at the price of one million rupees. A replica of “The Little Giant Tea Roller”, which is a unique machine made in 1880 by Walker and Co, was sold at 1,350,000 rupees.

An intriguing miniature ensemble was formed by the ‘Traditional Tea Tasting Set’, which went at 700,000 rupees. Among the other small-scale treasures that were auctioned were the ‘Traditional Tasting Scale’, ‘Traditional Auction Gavel’ and a few decorative tea caskets, crafted in silver and wood and studded with precious gemstones. The entire proceeds will be channelled to welfare projects for the benefit of the children of the tea industry.









