



Prem Chand Tamang (Pa/Papa)

14th of July 1950 – 10th of August 2020

I am writing this short tribute on Pa's life since we are grateful and humbled by the love and affection we received from his family, friends, colleagues, acquaintances and well-wishers and above all, from those who stood by him throughout his life, especially during the last two years of his illness. We are truly overwhelmed by the love, support and condolences we received from everyone since the day he passed away.

My father seems to have been a much loved and cared for man and I hope that this short write-up on my father's life will help many who were acquainted with him through his work or in passing to know him better and to remember him as the humble, generous, hard-working, resilient and family devoted man that he was.

Pa or Papa to his sons, Uncle and Jojo (elder brother) to family, Prem to his closest friends, Mr. Tamang and Tamang Saheb to those in the Tea and formal circles and Daju to all, passed away in the early morning hours of Monday, the 10th of August 2020 at Narayana Hrudayalaya, Bangalore. He had been admitted to the hospital following a relapse of his earlier disease, post Hematopoietic Stem Cell Transplantation, and he fought for 74 straight days this time until his heart finally gave in. Pa was diagnosed with MDS (RAEB-2) (Bone Marrow disease) in August of 2018 and had been given just 6 months to live and though eager to beat the disease this time too, he finally reconciled and was thankful as he neared the end for the extra time that God had graced him with.

Pa was born on the 14th of July 1950, eldest amongst nine siblings, to Tamang Dawa Lama (Former State Minister and Member of Parliament) and Late Sundari Lama of Chongtong Tea Estate. Being born and raised in a Tea Estate might have played an important role in Pa's life journey, his lifelong commitment, love and passion for the cultivation of tea, but in fact, our family's close association with Tea Estates goes back many generations.

My Great Grandfather, the late Sabut Lama was a devout Buddhist, a strong-willed individual with an inherent sense of right and wrong and a strong compassion for his local community of Chongtong Tea plantation workers, who faced many injustices during colonial / pre-independence times. From his humble beginnings, he rose to become a successful Entrepreneur and Businessman of the time from Chongtong and had the audacity to offer, not once but many times to buy Chongtong Tea Estate from its colonial-era owners because he saw it as the only way to improve the lives of his fellow brethren of tea workers. However, he was turned away many a time and could not pursue the matter to conclusion as he passed away unexpectedly in an automobile accident on the way back from a business related travel from Nepal.

Maymay (my Grandfather) was also born and raised in Chongtong Tea Estate during colonial / pre-independence times. As a young man and father, he too took upon the task of fighting social injustice in the tea plantations and after joining the leftist communist party, was actively involved in forming Darjeeling's first tea worker's union to demand and fight for their rights. Due to his political activities, he drew upon himself and his family the wrath of the ruling political party at that time, which used their local cadres, state and police machinery to incarcerate my grandfather. He spent

several years in various Jail's as a political prisoner. All the family businesses were specifically targeted, while family land and properties were unlawfully encroached upon and confiscated, bringing the family to near penury.

My father had to step up at a very early age to help his mother run what was left of a thriving business and look after his siblings, becoming a Surrogate father to his brothers and sisters, a role he continued to fill for almost his entire life. Against all odds, Pa still managed to pursue his basic education at Chongtong Primary School, went to Darjeeling Government Boys High School and graduated with a Bachelor's degree from Saint Joseph's College, Darjeeling. He was among the first individuals from Chongtong valley to graduate with a college degree.

After his graduation, he got married to our mother (Tara) and in 1973, Pa started his Tea career at Bhogotpore Tea Garden as a Junior Assistant Manager. From the humble salary of 500 Rupees that he earned at that time, he sent home half of it every month to support his mother and his eight younger siblings. He continued to support his family, relatives and friends throughout his life, always helping someone who was in need, never expecting anything for himself in return.

Coming from his humble origins and fighting against all adversities, with hard-work and dedication, Pa built a successful career in the tea industry becoming a Tea Garden Manager in 1981, a Tea Garden Superintendent in 1990, a Tea Company Superintendent in 1994 and the Executive Director of the Tea Promoters India Group in 2001.

When I look back, I realise that three generations of our family have ultimately followed the same goal, yet they chose different approaches towards achieving these goals. While my Entrepreneur Great Grandfather sought to buy a Tea Plantation in order to help the workers lead a life of dignity without injustices, my revolutionist leftist Grandfather sacrificed the family business in order to lead the political fight for tea worker's rights. It seems that our father, whether consciously or unconsciously, or perhaps due to his harmonious nature and personality, chose the "middle" path of working with the Tea Estate owners while always looking out for the wellbeing of the tea workers. He was among the first to embrace the concept of fair-trade and did everything within his possibilities to ensure that all the tea garden workers, from all ranks and files, were always treated fairly and justly. Even though there is still much to be done, his legacy and achievements in the area of fair-trade and sustainable organic tea-farming will continue to benefit the workers lives he touched and hopefully inspire more people to join the movement to make your quintessential "cup of tea" fairer for all tea workers.

Pa was the Bedrock of our family and the binding force that kept our huge collective family together through times of adversity, which were many, and he will be missed dearly by all of us. He was a loving and caring Son, Father, Brother, Uncle, Guide, Advisor and friend to all of us and his extended family. He never complained about what fate dealt to him and was always thankful for his lot in life. He reveled in the progress and success of his nephews, nieces and friends and their children and would always be caring and considerate even towards the very end when he was fighting for his own life.

The last two years of his life were tough on him as he never did get to truly retire and be with his family and especially his grandchildren in the way he had wanted. This would truly be his only regret in life, not being able to see his grandchildren grow up and spend more time with them.

To sum up my father's life as he lived it, it would suffice to say that he was a simple man with simple joys and pursuits and he was always content, infinitely generous, always happy and smiling and quick to wit. He never looked down at anyone, treated everyone with the same respect and empathy and inspired us all with his selflessness to become better human beings.

We all know that life is finite and it is at times like these that you stop to ponder about the true meaning of life. Looking back at how our Father lived his life, we realise that even in his passing away, he left us with an inspiring life lesson. We, his children, feel that if we strive hard and manage to live our lives even a little bit like our Father did, perhaps one day when the time comes, we might also be able to look back and think that it was a life well lived, just like our father did.

Pa spent a major part of his life as a Tea Executive; however, deep in his heart, he was and continued to remain a Farmer, a passionate Tea Farmer for whom there was no greater joy in life other than seeing Tea bushes grow and flourish. I am highlighting below some of my father's cherished milestones and achievements in his professional life that he was proud of as a Pioneering Organic Tea Farmer, Organiser of Small Tea Farmers Groups and Co-ops and Fair-Trade enthusiast and facilitator in Darjeeling.

This is the Legacy he leaves behind for us.

- Pa was the Manager of the **1st Darjeeling Tea Garden (Singell TE)** to be certified **Bio Organic** by Naturland and subsequently the IMO in 1989 and 1990 respectively.
- Pa served as the **Founding Honorary Chairman of PROJECT SERVE** (Serve the Environment and Rejuvenate Vital Employment-Supported by Projekt Werkstatt TeeKampagne of Germany), Darjeeling from 1992 until it was handed over to WWF India.
- Pa and his close associate Dr. Benedikt Kaukler of TopQualiTea Germany were instrumental in the **Construction of the Chongtong Junior High School Building** in Chongtong TE in 1995.
- Pa, Dr. Benedikt Kaukler and Mr. Harish Mukhia were instrumental in developing the long abandoned **Mineral Springs Tea Garden (Dabai Pani)**, Lebong Valley into a commercially vibrant Bio Organic Certified Small Tea Farmers Organisation (**Mineral Springs Tea Cooperative /Sanjukta Vikas Sanstha**) in 1997/1998.
- Pa was actively involved with GEPA mbh (Germany) in the development of **Subarna Small Farmers Tea Cooperative**, Samabeong, Kalimpong into a Bio Organic Certified Small Tea Farmers Organisation in 1997.

- He was also actively involved in the development of the long abandoned **Potong Tea Garden** into a Commercially Viable and successful Worker's Collective (**PTWWC**) in 2005.
- Pa was involved in the revival and consolidation of the **Small Farmers Tea Project** and Peermade Development Society supported **Peermade Tea Factory** in Peermade, Kerala where he remained the Managing Partner for 9 years until his resignation in December of 2018, owing to his debilitating illness.
- Pa was elected for Two Consecutive Terms as an International Delegate to the **Naturland** (Major International Association of Organic Producers) **World Governing Assembly**.
- He was also a Founding Board Member of Network of Asia and Pacific Producers (**NAAP**) of **FairTrade International**.

We deeply grieve his passing away and celebrate his life,

Tara, Praveen, Silvia and Marcos, Reggie, Betila, Jyetsun and Yuwan, Nitin, All members of the Family