

Jayshree Teas Are Recognized as Among the Best in the World

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Balasun Tea Estate in Darjeeling, home to Balasun Mystic Second Flush, one of the Gold Medal winning teas awarded by UK Tea Academy and cultivated this year by Jayshree Tea and Industries. (Photo: Jayshree Tea & Industries Ltd.)

“[The Leafies](#),” which have been awarded since 2020 by UK National Tea Academy (UKTA) in collaboration with storied retailer Fortnum & Mason, are designed to “promote integrity, excellence and collaboration within the international tea industry.” This year, four hundred entries were submitted. From these, the third largest tea producer in the world, Jayshree Tea & Industries Limited with head offices in Kolkata, India, distinguished itself from the field by winning five esteemed prizes. The prestigious awards ceremony was held on November 6th at the Mayfair Hotel in London. Jayshree’s performance topped all tea producers as it earned the highest number of awards, and with it, the highest of accolades.

Accepting the award by video was Chairperson and Managing Director of Jayshree Tea and Industries Limited Jayshree Mohta. Mrs. Mohta thanked the UKTA and her team at Jayshree for the honor. She ascribed the company’s drive for excellence to her roots: “My father, late Basant Kumar Birla, founded Jayshree Tea Industries Limited in 1945 with a vision to achieve perfection in every cup of tea. His words continue to inspire us [to] strive for excellence and settle for nothing less.”

She added: “Today, we proudly carry forward his legacy, driven by the same passion and commitment to excellence. I extend my heartfelt thanks to our tea estate teams, master tea makers, customers, partners, and the UKTA Leafies for recognizing our efforts.”



Chairperson of Jayshree Tea & Industries Ltd, Jayshree Mohta makes her acceptance speech for five Leafies awards at the Jayshree head office in Kolkata. (Photo: Jayshree Tea & Industries Ltd.)

The performance topped their stellar showing in 2023, which saw Jayshree win two prizes.

This year, Jayshree won the gold medal in the Darjeeling category for its Balasun garden Mystic Second Flush tea, and its Turzum Garden Panned and Steamed Green Tea, which earned gold in the Experimental category.

Among those “Highly Commended” awardees were: Darjeeling Puttabong Moondrop recognized in the Darjeeling Category; Assam Mangalam CTC BP CL SPL distinguished in the CTC Category; and Assam Mangalam Orthodox FTGFOP1 CL SPL awarded in the Assam Category. Mangalam Manjushree had gained international acclaim earlier in the year by winning 2nd place for India at the North American Tea Conference (NATC).

Among those responsible for this year’s triumph is Maitreyi Kandoi, daughter of Jayshree Mohta. Speaking to World Tea News from her office at the Jayshree headquarters in Kolkata, Mrs. Kandoi said the process began with her sending out messages to all her garden managers (Jayshree has 19 gardens in 4 regions in India) and asking them to submit their best teas for consideration.

“We then did a blind tasting session, with some of our best tasters in-house, and we laid out a table of around 10 invoices. We shortlisted from there, and then we sent out those

[teas] for the awards,” Maitreyi Kandoi says. “Thankfully, most of those shortlisted got the awards. Okay—almost all of them!”



Jayshree Tea Tasters, Sajeew Roy (left), Sumit Dalan (center), and Ravi Suchanti (right), tasting and selecting teas for the shortlist for submission to The Leafies. (Photos by Jayshree Tea & Industries Ltd. collated by SB Veda.) (Photo: Jayshree Tea & Industries Ltd.)

Mrs. Kandoi is relatively new to the company, which has undergone a significant turnaround in management in recent years with the retirement of senior executives in favor of a new generation stepping in. With that transformation, quality is now being prioritized over quantity, though yield and efficiency in the gardens continue to remain important to the business.

Mrs. Kandoi has a laser-sharp focus on quality management, and she has been instrumental in developing a corporate culture around the best of production values. As one might imagine, it is a colossal job to manage quality standards at so many gardens across different regions. “I’m tasting each and every cup that comes from the garden, whether it’s from Assam or Darjeeling, Kachar or Dooars. So that’s almost 250 to 300 cups a day,” she says.

Mrs. Kandoi and the other Jayshree tasters then give their feedback to the garden, so the managers can determine how to respond if issues are identified.

When I first tasted Jayshree garden teas around ten years ago, I found some smokiness in their second flush that was suggestive of over-firing in the sample batch of teas that was sent to me. Today, this would not be tolerated by the team of tasters. Jayshree teas are to taste as natural as possible, allowing the intrinsic flavor of the plant to dominate the brew.

Indeed, the difference between then and now is almost striking. It has been my observation that Jayshree Darjeeling teas from the last two years (as I haven't really tasted teas from their other regions) have been exemplary in aroma, body, complexity (melange of flavor notes), and aftertaste. Certain elements are favored, depending on the harvest and garden. The common characteristic that can be enjoyed across these teas is that they are smooth, even silky, particularly those plucked during early harvests. This is true even after a long steep.



Turzum Tea Estate, Darjeeling, where the gold medal-winning tea in the Experimental Category, Turzum panned and steamed green tea was cultivated. (Photo: Jayshree Tea & Industries Ltd.)

The Birla family is one of India's storied industrialist clans. Despite its impressive size, theirs is a family business, and this generation's representative, Maitreyi, isn't just concerned with tasting, she is active in selling, marketing, and business development. "I'm also involved in the exports where we travel. We meet our customers, buyers, understand their needs, and then try to deliver. And even in the domestic market, I'm in touch with all the buyers now," she remarks.

The Leafies, being a prestigious international set of honors, rewarding tea quality, innovation, and sustainability, offers the company a prime platform to showcase its teas. The gold medalists will be featured at Fortnum & Mason's rare tea counter, where the posh retailer's most sought-after teas are bought by discerning connoisseurs.

Jayshree's triumph at The Leafies is a positive not only for the company, but also for Darjeeling tea as an industry, which has been facing many challenges of late such as labor difficulties, adverse weather conditions, and aging plants. Moreover, a general lack of awareness among the consuming public of the distinctive nature of the tea, compared to other teas, can make it difficult to sell the teas for what they are worth. Long known as "the Champagne of Teas," Darjeeling is generally considered to be the region where the best teas in the world are produced. However, many tea-drinkers just

are simply unaware of how to prepare or consume the beverage to truly enjoy Darjeeling's unique character.

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While teas from Jayshree's lush Assam gardens were also winners, Maitreyi Kandoi has a special affinity for Darjeeling tea, given that it is probably the only indigenously produced product in India that can be considered best in class: "I think I'm just a little more passionate about Darjeeling and trying to promote it...Darjeeling needs that promotion. After all, in the global marketplace, [with] how many products from India can you say, this is the world's best product? And it literally is?" she says. "We meet so many buyers from all across the world and in India, and out of all the teas that they can have an option to drink, everybody loves Darjeeling, and I think it's just held in the highest regard."

Mrs. Kandoi strongly feels that Darjeeling tea cannot simply be sold as a commodity like certain other teas. That it is held in such esteem and has been for centuries, makes it more appropriate to sell Darjeeling tea as a luxury beverage. The Leafies only serve to enhance its reputation and those of the other winners.



Jayshree's Puttabong Tea Estate where Highly Commended Puttabong Second Flush Moondrop was cultivated. (Photo: Jayshree Tea & Industries Ltd.)

Tea education, Mrs. Kandoi insists, is a central motivator for consumers to understanding and appreciating this world class tea, thereby attributing to Darjeeling its legitimate value. Jayshree is contributing to this by conducting tastings on social

media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn. “With the visuals offered on these platforms, one can almost vicariously enjoy the tastings,” she says. Certainly, they offer an opportunity to learn about the flavor profiles and brewing techniques.

The social media tastings complement the physical tastings, which the company is engaging in far more than in the past with interested people, both buyers and the public. “We have a first flush tasting, we have a second; we have a specialty tea tasting. And, now we have on board, this lady tea maker who is a specialty tea maker. She does handmade tea in Darjeeling and Assam, and one of her teas, which was the green tea, panned and steamed, won the experimental category [at The Leafies],” says Mrs. Kandoi. “She does these tea ceremonies where she does the Gong Fu style tea, which we are again opening up for the public, so... she'll brew a large amount of tea, maybe for 20 seconds, then she'll rebrew it over again through which the customer gets an idea of how you can experience tea in so many ways.”

Sayantani Neogi, who is Creative and Content Head at Jayshree Tea & Industries Ltd., came up with a promotional campaign called, “Drink Darjeeling, Save Darjeeling,” which features a sticker that has a design in which “Drink” becomes “Save” depending on the angle in which one views it. It’s a simple yet cogent message that the company brass believes will be key to the sustainability of Darjeeling tea.

Jayshree has made a foray into tea tourism, but they are leery of getting into the hospitality business just as so many other tea companies seem to be shifting their focus to this business. “Although tourism helps, tea has to exist because of what it is,” Mrs. Kandoi insists.

“I think more so than the actual hotel and service-oriented part of that as a business. Bringing tourists to the gardens may help promote the gardens in terms of drinking tea,” says Neogi. “So, [tourism] sort of has that ancillary effect.”

With their success at The Leafies, Jayshree won’t have to rely on tourism to promote their teas. The international acclaim will surely burnish their fortunes and those of their gardens in the process. The Leafies result is, in the end, a testament to the importance of pursuing excellence, rejuvenation, and experimentation at an organization with a long and storied history.

THE AWARD-WINNING TEAS:

Darjeeling Turzum Panned & Steamed Green Tea 2024

Crafted during the Indian monsoon 2024, this tea won Gold in the experimental category. This innovative tea delivers delicate floral notes, light green liquor, and a gentle sweetness, making it a standout in artisanal green tea craftsmanship.



Darjeeling Balasun Mystic Second Flush 2024

This tea, from the prestigious Balasun Estate, offers a smooth, mellow cup that lingers on the palate. It won Gold for its exquisite floral aroma and pronounced muscatel character.



Darjeeling Puttabong Second Flush Moondrop 2024

Created from exclusive AV2 and T78 clones, this tea was handpicked in Summer 2024. The exceptional tea offers a bright, golden infusion with nuanced muscatel notes and a smooth finish, bringing the distinctive charm of the Puttabong Estate to every cup. It received a Highly Commended recognition from The Leafies.



Assam Mangalam Second Flush CTC BP 2024

Crafted from hardy and flavorful Assamica cultivars and harvested in Summer 2024, this tea delivers a bold, full-bodied infusion with a malty aroma. With its rich amber hue, the tea reflects the distinctive character and depth of Assam's celebrated second flush. The award-winning tea received a Highly Commended recognition.



Assam Mangalam Manjushree Second Flush Orthodox Gold 2024

Made from select clonal leaves harvested in Summer 2024, the tea showcases golden tips and a deep amber hue. With its complex, sweet-malty profile, this luxurious tea represents the finest orthodox Assam selection, perfect for refined palates. It received a Highly Commended recognition.

