

FEW WORDS ON NATURALIST E.P.GEE, DISCOVERER OF GOLDEN LANGUR



FIG.-1

British born Naturalist and Conservationist Edward Pristichard Gee, discoverer of Golden Langur *Trachypithecus geei* (KHAJURIA)

The North Eastern Region of India is a land full of greeneries with dense evergreen, semievergreen and deciduous forests with large number of streams, rivers, tributaries, subtributaries and wetlands. The region is rich in biodiversity, rich in endemic flora and fauna. When the pioneering tea planters from Europe and England came here to start new plantations after the discovery of tea plant, scientifically known as *Cameilia sinensis*, variety *assamica* (Masters) Kitionuria (*Thea assamica* Masters) in the wild in 1823 and to manage already established tea gardens. Many of those adventurers were avid and enthusiastic wildlife lovers and wildlife conservationists. Their contribution to conservation of wildlife in India is noteworthy in many ways.

A tea garden namely Doyang Tea Estate, Post Office- Oatong, Pin-785603, is situated adjacent to the Oating Railway station of North Frontier Railway at a distance of about 325 km. from Guwahati and about 14 km by road from Golaghat, the head quarter of Golaghat district of the state of Assam, India. Mr. Cowley, the proprietor of Doyang Tea Estate, hailed from England and his son served the garden as manager. The area of the garden under tea plantation is 422.49 hectare. The staff members of the garden are 22 with seven hundred permanent and 36 temporary workers with a population of about 3,364 at present.



FIG. 2
Road to Doyang Tea Estate

E.P. Gee was a renowned British born naturalist and wildlife conservationist of India. He had joined the Doyang Tea Estate in the year 1946 as Assistant Manager. At the time of his joining the tea garden as Assistant Manager, the author of this book was about two years old. The Doyang Tea Estate is at a distance of about six kilometers from the author's residence at Barpatharua village on the way to Golaghat Doyang Tea garden Road. E.P. Gee graduated from Cambridge University, U.K.



FIG. 3
Logo of Doyang Tea Estate, Grob.Tea Company Ltd, Haute Street, Topsia Road, Kolkata-700048, India.



FIG. 4
Direct view of a site of Doyang Tea Garden.

In the year 1954 the Doyang Tea Estate was sold to Grob. Tea Company Ltd, Haute Street, Topsia Road, Kolkata-700048, India, as Mr. Cowley's son was not interested in the management of the tea garden.



FIG. 5
Office of the Doyang Tea Estate, Oating, Golaghat

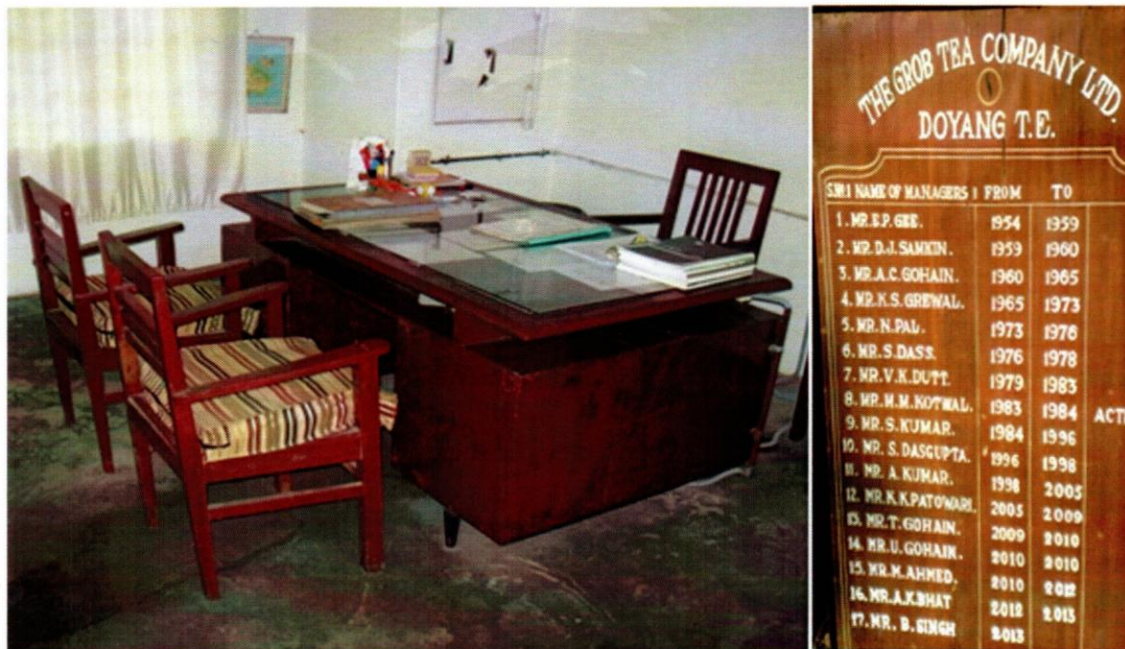


FIG. 6
Office of the Manager of Doyang Tea Estate, Oating where E.P. Gee worked



FIG. 7
Manager's Residence where E.P. Gee resided from the year 1955-1959

From the year 1955 the garden happened to be under the management of Grob. Tea Company and from then E.P. Gee had been entrusted into the responsibility of serving the garden as Manager. However, ownership of the garden of Mr. Cowley continued upto 1954. The service period of E.P. Gee in Doyang Tea Estate was from 1946 to February 1959. He was unmarried.



FIG. 8
Tea House of Doyang Tea Estate



FIG. 9
Tea processing Factory of Doyang Tea Estate

E.P. Gee had great aptitude for study and to learn about wildlife. Gee discovered the unique and rare primate species Golden Langur, relevant to this book, existing in the Manas Biosphere Reserve along Assam-Bhutan International border, situated at the north west of the state of Assam of Indian sub-continent between the river Sankosh in the west and river Manas on the east in the year 1956. Gee wrote a personal account of his wildlife work in the book 'Wildlife of India' and printed and published the book from Collins, London, in the year 1964. The then Prime Minister of India, Jawahar Lal Nehru, wrote the Foreword for the book which is one of the few pieces he wrote on wildlife conservation. The manuscript of the book was typed by Mr. Bipul Chandra Borbora, who was working as Office Assistant in Doyang Tea Garden and retired as Head Assistant in 1997. Gee engaged B.C. Borbora for typing the manuscript of the book on Sunday or holiday in manager's residence and never in official day and for this work Mr. Borbora was paid Rs.40 or 50.00 from his end. In the first edition ten thousand copies were immediately sold while the books were in press. Purchasers of the book were mostly from foreign countries.

E.P. Gee was a regular writer of 'Illustrated Weekly of India' and in the daily news paper 'The Assam Tribune' Guwahati, Assam, during the period of his serving here in Assam. The esteemed Journal of India "The Bombay Natural History Society", published since 1903 had given further scope for this kind of scientific research on the wildlife. Several scientific research papers were published in "Bombay Natural History Society" written by E.P. Gee.

Gee, E.P., 1954. The Management of India's National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries, Part, II", Journal of Bombay Natural History Society, Vol. 52.

Gee, E.P., 1956. A new species of Langur from Assam. Journal of Bombay Natural History Society, vol.53.

Gee, E.P., 1961. The distribution and feeding habits of the Golden Langur *Presbytis geei* (Khajuria, 1956).

Gee, E.P., 1962. The Management of India's National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries, Part, IV, Journal of Bombay Natural History Society, Vol.59.

Gee, E.P., 1968. The Management of India's National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries, Part V, Journal of Bombay Natural History Society, Vol.65.

Soon after independence, in March 1949 the provincial Government had invited one of India's best known wildlife conservationists and Ornithologists, Salim Ali and American Ornithologist Dillon Ripley to enquire into the condition of wildlife in undivided Assam (North Eastern Region of India) and to provide suggestions and recommendations for the management and improvement of sanctuaries. They were accompanied by E.P. Gee and C.G. Boron to acquaint them with the status of wild animals in Assam. For the protection of wildlife with the sanction of law, the State Wildlife Board was formed in 1953 with distinguished persons like E.P. Gee, Satradhikar Goswami of Garmurh Satra and P.C. Baruah, the senior conservator of forest as members of the board. Gee was also honorary Secretary of Wildlife Board of India, Eastern Region till his expiry. The Indian Board of Wildlife also put pressure on the Government to protect animal in Wildlife Sanctuaries. The Board had taken another important initiative of not allowing foreign dignitaries and VIPs to shoot inside the Sanctuaries and Parks. The customary myth of the time was that nobody was fit enough to take charge of the wildlife unless one had shot dead a tiger. E.P. Gee came up with an innovative idea by the middle of the 1950s with an alternative and asserted that no one should take charge of the forest division until he had caught fish with the rod and line.

Gee also participated in the first ever One-horned Rhino census that took place in Assam in the year 1948. This took him far beyond his adopted homeland of Assam. He built up Rhino members in Kaziranga in Assam after independence. In the early 1930, Kaziranga was closed and completely left to itself by the forest department. Gee mentioned that even elephants would not venture here. Gee also mentioned the attitude of the then British Conservator of forest who was convinced that 'no one can enter the place'.

The Kaziranga Wildlife Sanctuary got an improved management during the energetic leadership of A. Milroy who opened Kaziranga for the visitors in 1938. E.P. Gee joined in one of the first batches to visit Kaziranga once it was opened for visitors. Gee observed the flora and fauna of Kaziranga and also the behavior and external features of One-horned Rhino riding on an elephant.

It was due to his efforts Kaziranga became a Wildlife Sanctuary in the year 1950 from the status of a game sanctuary and his love for Kaziranga made him put this National Park in the world map. When Kaziranga National Park was visited by Jawahar Lal Nehru, the then Prime Minister of India in the year 1958 E.P. Gee guided Nehru riding on elephant. The importance of a tourist lodge was first felt by Gee at Kaziranga National Park. Before the opening of tourist lodges at Kaziranga, visitors from different countries of the world were welcomed by Gee and the visitors stayed with Gee at Doyang Tea Estate. Gee took part in activities of carrying the visitors to the Kaziranga by his personal vehicle namely a "Land Rover".

The riverine, semievergreen, evergreen and deciduous forests of mighty river Brahmaputra flowing through Assam became hunting ground for British Officials as well as other European tea planters. There was enough hunting activity and sport mainly by the colonial officials as well as the European tea planters. Kaziranga, which was declared as Game Sanctuary in the year 1916, was a planter's heaven for the sport in tiger and Rhinoceros. Gee earnestly believed that the most indiscriminate killing of Wildlife in Assam took place during the time of the

Second World War, while this region was converted into a theatre of war fare, with moving military personals, stationed through the length and breadth of the province, which had forced the wildlife strength of the state to decline sharply. Gee also began a career of the 'Scientific observation' of the wilds. The branch of Zoology had captured the minds of the wildlife conservationists. It was not merely a question of conservation of the wild but also an interest in the Science involved. Consequently tea planters left fascinating observations on the wildlife of Assam.

During Gee's service period at Doyang Tea Garden while he was in leave for 4 or 5 months he used to visit Africa and made documentary films on wildlife of Africa and showed the films in the Doyang and nearer tea gardens and neighbouring villages by using projectors. The films made on wildlife were silent and Mr B.C. Borbora, Office Assistant of the Doyang Tea Garden, was engaged to explain in Assamese.

Gee ardently participated in another pastime, namely, angling. Not only did he practice it but also performed the role of advocating non-harmful effects of angling. He possessed two rubber boats, each having the capacity for sailing three persons. The rubber boats were filled with air by cycle pump or pumping by mouth. The fishes were captured in Doyang and Dhansiri rivers, flowing near the Doyang Tea Garden. The fishes captured by angling were also given to the boatman and the person who accompanied Gee. Sailing on the boat he took photographs with movie camera of the wild animals of Doyang Reserve Forest covering an area of 246.35 sq.km. and Nambor Reserve Forest of about 897.27 sq.km. area located close to the Doyang Tea Garden.



FIG.10

A site of a course of Doyang River where E.P. Gee sailed on rubber boat for angling.

Gee used to take photograph of the Black-necked Stork (*Xenorhyncus asiaticus*) in the 'Hamdoi', a large paddy field near Banhboria village located close to the Furkating Railway Junction of North Frontier Railway. Gee was a contemporary of famous Ornithologist Salim Ali and he stayed with Gee when Salim Ali was in Golaghat. Both of them were interested in taking photographs of migratory birds and used to put rings in the legs of young ones in the nest riding on tower made of bamboos in the bamboo forests mixed with shrubs at Banhboria village adjacent to 'Hamdoi' paddy field.



FIG. 11

'Hamdoi' paddy field where Shalim Ali and E.P. Gee took photograph of Black-necked Stork (*Xenorhynchus asiaticus*) and put rings to the young of migratory birds in the bamboo forest mixed with shrubs adjacent to the 'Hamdoi' paddy field.

Gee was the first person to report mystery of birds (killing of birds by men on attraction of artificial light keeping at night) at Jatinga, in the district of North Kachar Hills of the state of Assam. E.P. Gee was honest, punctual and sincere in his work. Gee was eager to keep social touch with the intellectual persons of Golaghat and also took personal care for the poor people. He served as an honorary lecturer in English Department of Debraj Roy College, a pioneer institution of Golaghat district, Assam, India, in the years from 1948-1950. During the period of teaching at Debraj Roy College he used to offer books and cash prizes to the student who stood first or secured highest marks in English subject. One of the books was "The moon and six penses" written by Somerset Maugham. Gee also showed documentary film on wildlife in the Debraj Roy College. He contributed magazines, journals and books on wildlife to Debraj Roy College Library in many occasions. He did not hesitate to contribute cash and kind to the educational institutes and Namghar (religious institute). He contributed building raw materials and cash to construct the building of Nogora High School and Namghar at Kunwari Village located near Doyang Tea Garden.

Gee was much interested in teaching and inspected schools under tea garden management. He stopped to issue ration to the garden workers and other employee if their children were found absent in the school. Once he stopped a passenger train at Oating Railway Station of North Frontier Railway adjacent to Doyang Tea Garden Office, as it arrived earlier and allowed the train to depart at schedule time.

The prestigious career of E.P. Gee should be mentioned as the beginning of a new chapter in the wildlife history of Assam. Though E.P. Gee began his career as Assistant Manager of tea plantation, he paid his attention to the rich wildlife potential of Assam. The wildlife history of India passed through the most contributory phase of his career. This period could be termed as transformation of the mindset of people from hunters-shooters to wildlife observer. The illustrious career of Gee put wildlife protection in Assam on better tracks. He was known for his famous black and white photography and his insightful pieces of journalistic writing.

After retirement and farewell from the Doyang Tea Garden on March 1959, Gee settled in Shillong, the capital of undivided Assam (North Eastern Region of India). Gee stayed in a cottage named "Green Cottage", which was managed by P.D. Stracey, the then Chief Conservator of forest of old Assam, India.

In the year April 1968, Gee suffered from brain tumour. For treatment, Gee was taken to London under the expense and management of Grob. Tea Company (Doyang Tea Estate). In London Gee was operated upon but unfortunately he breathed his last there on 22nd October, 1968.

E.P. Gee will always be remembered as the discoverer of Golden Langur, a renowned naturalist, conservationist, for his learning and lot of contributions towards Indian Wildlife, for bringing about a transformation of the hunters and shooters into wildlife observers and also for keeping close social touch to Indian society.

An interview with Mr. Bipul Chandra Borbora (78) was taken by the author of this book and some informations were obtained on the 14th September, 2014 in his residence at Dergaon, under Golaghat district, the state of Assam. Mr. B. C. Borbora retired as Head Assistant of Doyang Tea Estate, Post office- Oating, Pin-785603, Assam, India. Mr. Borbora joined the Doyang Tea Estate as an apprentice in the year 1954 and served as Office Assistant and retired from the post of Head Assistant in the year 1997, serving the Doyang Tea Estate for about 43 years.

The author's father, the freedom fighter of the struggle for independence of India. Late Narayan Chandra Dutta came to know that the Gramophone possessed by Mr. Cowley's son the manager of Doyang Tea Estate was going to be disposed. Many persons approached him but the manager was pleased with author's father and delivered the machine of the Gramophone to their house by a truck carrying it in his lap, sitting near the driver. The cabinet of the Gramophone was laid in the floor of the truck, carefully covered with straw. Not only those, several persons were engaged to hold the cabinet carefully. The author's father was able to possess the following sophisticated His Master's Voice Gramophone from him at the cost of Rs.500.00 (Rupees five hundred) only in the year 1940. The height of the Gramophone is 4.2 ft., breadth 2.4 ft., total weight about 42 kg, made in England. The diameter of the Gramophone record is 17 inches and speed of the record 78 round per minute.

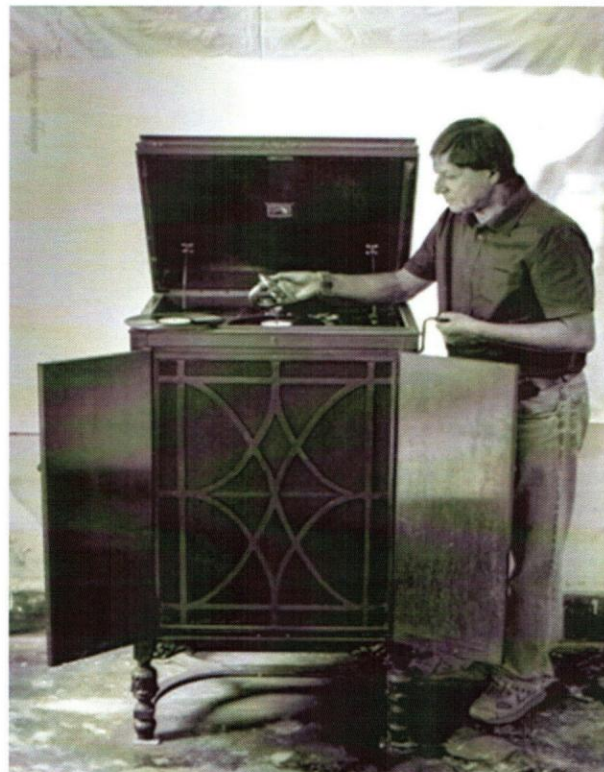


FIG. 12 (A)
The author is playing the Gramophone.



Mr. E.P.GEE

FIG. 12 (B)

STAFF MEMBERS OF DOYANG TEA ESTATE ON 26.2.1959 IN THE FAREWELL OF MR. E.P. GEE

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