

Students Join Darjeeling Tea Legend for Rare Plucking Ritual



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Imagine plucking tea leaves under the soft glow of a full moon. For three lucky members of Salesian College Autonomous Siliguri's Radio Club, this became a reality as they joined Darjeeling tea icon Rajah Banerjee to witness and document this unique ritual on the night of April 12th.

"It was an incredible first internship," shared Anand Kumar, a co-founder of the Radio Club and MA Psychology student. "The experience was so insightful and inspiring."

Their visit to a Kurseong tea village in the Darjeeling Hills focused on the distinctive full moon tea plucking, a concept pioneered by Mr. Rajah Banerjee of the renowned Makaibari tea estate. This fourth-generation tea planter, who champions small tea growers, believes that "tea leaves plucked during a full moon night has higher amino acid content and contain higher levels of antioxidants, which can provide potential health benefits."

Banerjee elaborated, "Tea leaves are plucked at midnight, during the full moon, when the leaves are said to be at their most relaxed state, and are processed with minimal handling to preserve their natural flavor and aroma." He emphasized the ritual's significance, calling it "a spiritual and cultural event deeply rooted in Darjeeling's rare tea traditions."

Adding to the mystique, workers use soft lighting like lanterns during the night harvest, a far cry from modern methods. Interestingly, older folklore among planters spoke of virgins plucking tea under the moonlight, a tradition filled with "lore and reverence for nature's rhythms with its magic and mystery."

Moonlight tea's limited availability makes it a highly sought-after and expensive delicacy.

Anshita Chettri

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