

Nazira woman joins as garden manager; breaks traditional male bastion

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GUWAHATI, Dec 7: For perhaps the first time in the nearly-200-year-old history of commercial tea cultivation in Assam, the industry has got a woman garden manager.

The credit for breaking the traditional male bastion goes to Manju Baruah, who is currently serving as garden manager for Apeejay Tea's Hilika Tea Estate at Doomdooma in Tinsukia district.

Manju (43), who is married and has a daughter, hails from Nazira in Sivasagar district. She has been part of the team across various management levels in different Apeejay tea gardens since 2000 when she had joined the group as a trainee welfare officer. She

was promoted to garden manager and joined Hilika TE in August this year.

Talking to *The Assam Tribune*, Manju said that she was happy to have achieved the milestone, which she felt would help break stereotypes about women's positions in traditional management structures.

"I am happy with my accomplishment and I accept it as a validation of my hard work and competence. Woman at the top is certainly a disruption of traditional management structures in tea gardens but it is a positive and much-needed disruption. Female workers outnumber males in the labour-intensive tea industry and so it is good to have a woman at the top sometimes," she said.

Terming managerial responsibilities



in tea gardens as a big challenge that also involves a lot of tedious outdoor duties, Manju said that her love for the outdoors and adventure since childhood served her in good stead in discharging her responsibilities.

"The management of Apeejay group has also been quite supportive and has helped me grow as a professional,"

she added.

Incidentally, her journey had begun with an advertisement she saw in *The Assam Tribune* after which she applied for the post in Apeejay Tea 18 years back. "I am also thankful to *The Assam Tribune*, as it all started with the advertisement," she said.

Stressing the need for a change in approach to management for making it gender sensitive, Manju said that the important thing was to keep in mind that there was nothing that a woman could not do what a man could do.

"Talent is gender neutral but I feel the approach to management has to change. If motive and ethics are right and you are doing full justice to your job, it does not matter what gender is

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at the top of the garden management structure. Along with challenges also come advantages and opportunities," she added.

Manju, who is an MBA, said that her long stint in the tea industry helped her to be sensitive to the needs of society and work for the welfare of the communities. "Job satisfaction means a lot for me and I can say with pride that my job has ensured precisely that," she said.