

With love from



KALPANA

*"From spring kissed gardens in Darjeeling,
summer-loving valleys of Assam, the blue
mountains of Nilgiris, you will always find me.
Hands like butterflies, going from tea to tea,
I am one and also many,
who could I be?"*



I am Kalpana. My name in Sanskrit translates to 'Imagination'. I am a tea plucker & wherever tea grows, it is always my hand that picks.

I live close to the tea gardens along with my mother, husband, and two beautiful children. And typically my day begins before the dawn breaks, before the birds' wake.



I make food for the family and pack my lunch for work. It gives me a great deal of pride to pack my work bundle - A sense of fulfillment that I am working hard for the family I have built. I don my boots (to keep me safe from snakes and insects), and carry my doko (the plucking basket).



Before I leave, my younger one comes to me with sleep laden eyes, "*Ma I want to go with you. Pick leaves with you. Take me*". My heart expands in my chest, with happiness over her sweet words. I guide her back to bed, back to her dreams.

Though I love what I do, I want her to do better than me. Be a doctor, a teacher, anything her heart desires.



As I arrive at the gardens, I breathe in the freshness of the air. I can hear my friends approaching, their laughter in the early hours awakens life around the gardens.

We find our allotted sections and as the sun travels across the sky, we spread across the estate, sometimes climbing 5500 ft to pick the best teas, working together under the sun, singing as we pick.



“Two leaves and a bud...two leaves and a bud...two leaves and a bud”,
an echoing mantra that runs through
my mind each time my hands reach
out to pick.

Its not long before I start to hum a tune
my grandma taught me (*“Resham firiri,
Resham firiri/ Udera jau ki dandama
bhanjyang resham firiri...”*) It translates
to, “My heart flutters like silk in the
wind/ I cannot decide whether to fly
or sit on the hilltop”.



The sun is now at the end of the horizon and paints the white Kanchenjunga, the shade of molten red lava signaling the end of the day. We head towards the depository to weigh in our day's picking.



As the teas get piled, sorted, weighed,,
and whisked away for processing,
Everyday we get applauded for our work
with rewards for the one who collects the
most leaves. Today it happens to be ME,
yeah! My mother was right about how the
sky holds the secret to our future.

I head back home tired but content. By
the time I reach home, my husband has
already cooked dinner. A piping bowl of
thukpa awaits and as we eat, we swap
stories of our days.



The night draws curtains over a long day
and before my eyes close with sleep, I
think of the thousands of leaves I picked.
A simple act, one that I repeat every day,
feels rewarding for me and my family.



Simply knowing my effort will reach far and wide across the world to someone who reaches out for a cup because he/she needs to PAUSE.

So the next time you steep your teas, think of those million women like me, who from dawn to dusk, work tirelessly to bring the best from the gardens right to your cup.



P.S.- Do share images of me with the world. It would bring me much joy to travel the world along with you and have the opportunity to share my story.

"Working here in the tea garden gives me actual joy, a sense of satisfaction. It's good to watch your efforts coming to fruition"

- Excerpts from a conversation with Kalpana



To know more about the life and stories of
the people responsible for your cup of tea,
read all about them right here.



٦