

How Far Will You Go For A Cup Of Tea?

Thank you, Queen Catherine of Braganza, for marrying King Charles 2 of England. Your marriage saved my evenings.

My tryst with teashops began some two and a half years ago when I left home for Trivandrum for my Civil Services preparation. Since my hostel provided only accommodation, food was taken from outside. Although food was okay (it was not!), I was not satisfied. With each passing day, my desperation grew. One week into this 'conundrum', I figured out that it was my tea that I missed. My dearest early morning and evening tea! Back home, tea was never a matter of concern. You wake up, brush your teeth, pray and there you have your morning tea. Since I found out the cause for my desperation, I decided to find a teashop nearest to my hostel.

My quest ended at Annapoornna Teashop, a small teashop run by a *Tamizhan Chettan*, only some 50 meters away from my hostel. That was the beginning of a new normal. Tea from Annapoornna after my Fajr prayer (early morning prayer around 5am – 6am) soon became my habit. A girl in the teashop early in the morning was not a usual scene, I now assume. It took me about a week to get into the diplomacy of a *chayakkada*. The *Tamizhan Chettan* was a one-in-a-million *chayakkaran*. He made me comfortable there. When others' teaglasses were washed only once, mine was washed twice. Whenever I seemed to be in a hurry, he gave me warm tea instead of the usual hot one even without being asked for it. He might have not realized that he was building me an ARK – an Act of Random Kindness!



My rather uneventful morning tea took a wonderful turn when a guy approached me at Annapoornna. He introduced himself as an aspirant (generic name for people who have been preparing for Civil Services exam and are currently unemployed) and told me that he has been observing me for a while. It took me some time to gather my senses. Suddenly I was ashamed of my night dress in broad daylight, worried about my sleepy eyes and horrified about my unkempt hair tucked in a headscarf. Although we became friends over a few cups of tea, I couldn't take our friendship to 'another level' because back at the hostel, Soorya bought an electric kettle with the best of intentions – to help her friend make her own tea rather than going out all alone in the dark. Soorya's kettle thus became the death knell of my 'potential lovestory.'

Though my morning tea was in solitude, my evening tea was a grand affair with Reshma, Meenu, Soorya and Anne joining me at the teashop. (This was before the 'advent' Soorya's kettle.) But Anne was my favourite tea-mate. Rain or shine, she was ever ready for a cup of tea. We had some peculiar character traits in common. May be that was why we bonded over tea so well. We soon began to experiment various teashops. Alchemy, Zam Zam, Dewaswom Board Canteen, Tiffin Center and what not! We walked the length and breadth of Nanthancode Junction for a cup of tea.

As we pepped up our exam preparations, there was hardly any time left for an elaborate tea. The once 'notorious' Soorya's kettle soon became a blessing. I made tea for myself and Anne. No one appreciated my tea like she did. She was a fangirl of my tea, literally! With hot tea, snacks and fresh gossips, we recreated the *chayakkada* ambience within our hostel's dining hall.

From some wonderful tea moments, what I learnt is that you can never hurry a tea. You 'have' to slowdown for a perfect cup of tea. May be that's why tea time is often known as a tea break – a break from the ruckus around you and sometimes inside you. Tea wouldn't have been a hot beverage if it wasn't for all these reasons!

NB: This January, Anne married Benson Idickula who doesn't drink tea. Anne... Would you come over for another tea date with me? What about a ginger tea this time??

P. S. Queen Catherine of Braganza, a Portuguese noble woman popularised tea with the English when she married King Charles 2 in 1661. The advent of tea into the hinterlands of India was thus an aftermath of colonisation.

With a heavy heart, I owe you a cup of tea, Queen Catherine!