



## SPOTLIGHT

# Story of a friendship old

Have you noticed your 'cha-wala' lately? No? Well, he has. If you are a tea enthusiast and have been frequenting a 'tong' for your regular meet-ups, you know what I am saying. If you have not, snuggle in with a steaming cup. Let us take you on a tour of the hangout that is as old as the city and introduce you to one of the closest friends you find there: the cha-wala.

Many tongs now offer quite intriguing varieties of tea, anticipating the many moods of the many visitors. If you feel a little hungry but do not want to commit to a snack or a meal at the moment, the Maltova tea is for you. It is a regular tea with milk (condensed more often than not) and sugar but with a sprinkle of the chocolate powder.

Now, when the cha-wala says Maltova, they do not really mean the brand in particular. You could be seeing a bottle of Boost from where they jazz up your cup, but you still are to ask for Maltova. That is just how things are.

Another interesting- and- only- found- in- tongs tea is the "coffee-tea." This tea has more important implications than taste: peace!

It brings an end (if only temporary) to the age old debate between tea and coffee and which is better. This is where the hard-core coffee drinkers and sophisticated tea connoisseurs join in holy brotherhood; to beat up the non-committed drinker of coffee tea, of course.

So, it is a great conversation starter too. If



your party at the 'tong' seems to die down, which happens on the rare occasion, order a coffee tea and experience three way conversations brewing up.

- What is it?
- Tea or coffee? Make up your mind!
- Why do you spoil perfectly good tea (or coffee; depending on the preference of the annoyed)?

If the barrage of questions feels a little



too much, you can always ask for a green chilli tea. Nobody messes with someone drinking hot chillies.

However, the tea is not that hot. It is somewhat sweet, actually, until you chew on one of the chilli bites.

In that case, Malta tea can be your only saviour. It has a subtle taste with a light infusion of tea leaves and a splash of orange. Its fruity flavour will take away the

heat of chilli but if you like a stronger tea, it is probably not the right one for you.

Which is the right tea then, you may ask. This is where the cha-wala comes in. He knows his regulars like he knows his tea. He observes the slightest change in your voice, the way you stand, and the way you greet him to discern your mood. Then, he announces your tea for the day.

"Mama (Bro?), your voice is a little hoarse; ginger tea today?"

Anyone can tell a broken voice, you may say and you will be right. The cha-wala understands you on an even deeper level. He connects with you emotionally and like all friends, he is very concerned about your companions. If you have with you a person who is not well suited for you, he is going to give long disappointed glances. Then, the only acceptable reply you can muster is a promising look that says, "I know. I'll rethink it."

The most wonderful thing happens when he has not seen you with a friend of his liking for a few days. He will start by asking you where they are. Of course, if the absence of his favourite gets overbearing, your ever so caring cha-wala will go for drastic measures. By drastic measures, I mean this incident where he says, "I have put more sugar in your tea today. You do remember who likes extra sugar, don't you?"

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**Photo: LS Archive/Sazzad Ibne Sayed**

