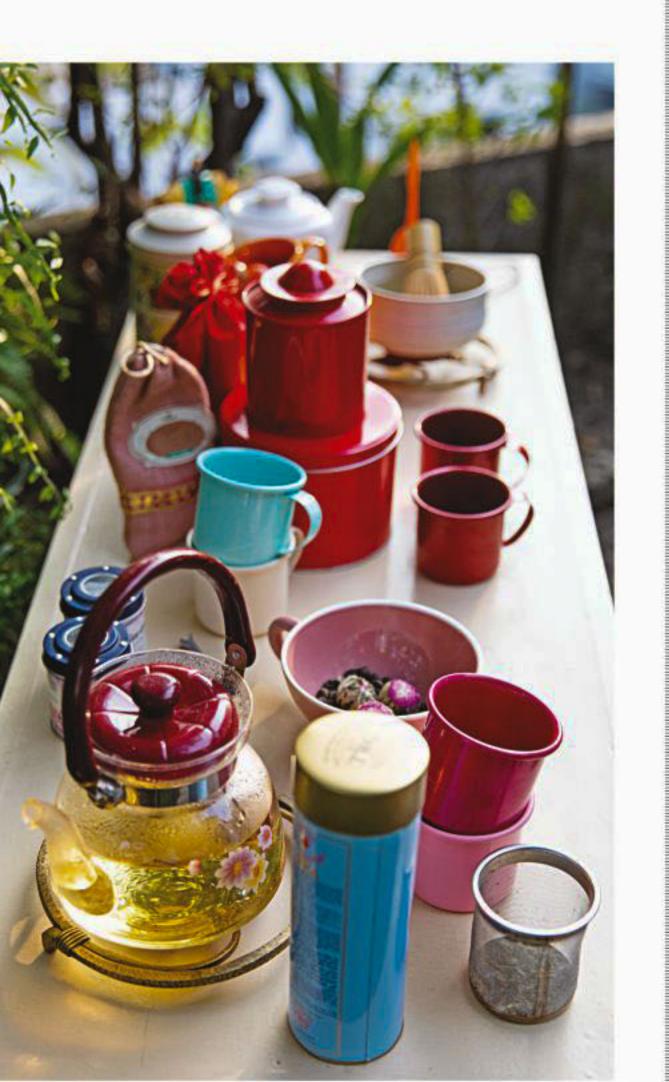


The classic movies and books that have influenced my childhood cemented two ideas of romance in my head— slow dancing and shared tea time leading to romance.



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The gently swaying couples in the movies, with gentlemen holding the ladies' waists, swayed magically into love. And reading Jane Austen subliminally suggested tea's role as an aphrodisiac, with high tea being a sure-fire way of getting two similar souls to bond over shared opinions and passions She made the entire practice of delicately sipping tea more romantic than practical.

Despite the 200 years since her time, tea remains one of the most loved beverages all over the world. From heartbreaks to stress management, cups of hot tea can somehow quell pain and bring in a surge of relief that is immediate and consistent.

To me, a hot cup of tea is perhaps much more than just that. The process of brewing the fragrant infusion in the early morning, when the children are still fast asleep; seeping the tea bag into the hot water, and watching the loose green leaves slowly mingle with piping hot water releases enough dopamine to get me through the day.

The aromatic and flavour variations of artisan tea is a standalone discussion on its own. But the morning ritual has become so habitual for me that I can't seem to get through the day without looking at the shimmering ochre tones of a pick-me-up

Some may argue that green tea, or an earl grey, is perhaps not the best way to have tea. If it's not masala chai or milk tea, you are not a true Bengali, they say!

To delve into the Bangaliana in me, I experiment with milk tea once in a while. But whatever concoction I manage to create, always seems to fall short against the luscious cups sold at roadside stalls, or tong-er-cha, as it is popularly known.

Whispers blowing with the wind narrate that everything from raw eggs to curry masala are blended in to make this special cha. Nevertheless, I choose to usually stay away from rumours. Based on my personal opinion, it's the affection of friends, the beautiful surroundings, the smell of charcoal and more... that makes it special, not the druids' concoction!

Another personal encounter with tea is one that most affected my young impressionable mind at the age of nine; a silver samovar that my mum used to bring out regularly for our monthly get-togethers, a priceless relic from her many forays in the

Middle East.

We used to sit around the dazzling silverygrey antique and enjoy white tea, with little

square shaped chunks of sugar clumped between the cheeks — because that was just the Persian way to drink tea! AND THE

Much later, I learnt that any sort of mingling and soiree is not complete without the translucent hot beverage taking centre stage. At these parties, I also learnt that there was so much more to tea than just regular earl grey, oolong, and green — because there's also artisan invoked charcoal tea, sugary Turkish Rize tea, salty Tibetan butter tea, and so many other exotic variants. As an adult, I became a regular at these parties, because the tea tasting ceremonies were nothing less glamorous than any wine tasting festival, and secondly, because of the cutlery.

Oh, the beauty of it all.

The ceramics are in a different league of their own; paired with the perfect tea, the whole celebration becomes regal and majestic. Small wonder then, that royals all over the world are so taken by the delicious, fragrant beverage.

Another tea centric party is the

Christmas merrymaking in Bangladesh.
Partaking in the festival's spirit, every
Christmas, I make sure to light our table-top
tree with enough bells and sparkling décor,

