

Documentation of Paan

Special Project

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Aim

Aim of this project was to document the process of making a Paan (betel leaf). In the process of documentation, the role of a 'Paanwala' (the person who prepares Paan and owns a Paan shop) was also very important. The objective was to know more about Paan, which is an integral part of Indian culture and the 'Paanwala', who is a very interesting character to study.

Methodology

The documentation started with visits to nearby Paan shops and eating Paan. Observing a Paan shop and the Paanwala was the first step. Visits to several Paan shops, observations, conversations with the Paanwalas and the people eating Paan was the mode of data collection. Initially the medium for documentation was not restricted. Later on video was freezed as the primary medium for all documentation. Documentation was done by two groups. One group visited Paan shops in Mumbai and the other group covered the Paan shops of Allahabad. Variety in Paan and ways of making Paan was essentially the focus of documentation. Candid conversations with the Paanwalas and other people at the Paan shops enrich the information gathered.

Paan

The Betel leaf is popularly known as 'Paan' in India. It is a medicinal plant whose leaves are taken as a spice. Paan is evergreen and available all round the year. The leaves are glossy and heart shaped. It grows to about 1 metre in height. Warm humid climate is ideal for the cultivation of paan, which is a fast growing creeper. It can tolerate some amount of drought but is too sensitive to



grow in regions outside the tropical belt. The soil has to be rich and there must be sufficient shade. It requires regular caring with plenty of nourishment and water. It is grown extensively in India. At one time it was grown across the Far East, India and went on to Madagascar and East Africa.

The paan leaves are generally chewed either by itself or in combination with slaked lime, betel nuts (areca variety) and other exotic stuff like aniseed and sometimes tobacco. There are several ways a paan can be

folded. Preparation of paan is an art and the technique is passed down from generation to generation.

Asian history is incomplete without the paan. In Sanskrit it is called 'Tambula' and chewing betel is an ancient habit. Tambula, is derived from the term 'tamra' meaning copper indicating red colour. This red colour is because of one of the most popular ingredients of paan namely catechu or katha. Chewing the leaves and nuts promotes red colored stimulating salivation, turning the mouth red.

Paan is a vital part of Hindu religion. Money is placed on it while payments are made to priests. In Bengali weddings the bride covers her face with two paan leaves and removes them at the time of exchange of the first glances with the groom.



In Maharashtra there is a special wedding custom in which the bride holds a betel roll in her mouth half of which the bridegroom bites from the other end. As a gesture of hospitality, all over India, paan is offered. In the Vedas too there is reference to paan being the first offering to the guru. The Kamasutra mentions it as necessary to the rituals of courtship and courtesans reddened their lips by chewing a paan. The areca nut represented the male and the betel leaf the female principle according to ancient Indian texts. Paan freshens the breath and is also an ayurvedic aphrodisiac and a digestive medicine. Old medicinal treatises like the Charaka samhita list thirteen qualities of a good paan including its look, taste and fragrance. The panwala sits with selection of betel leaves soaking in a brass pot or a steel bucket and the

ingredients in a row of shiny bowls before him. As he swiftly folds the leaves, a radio behind him will be playing Hindi film songs. The local paan shop is a place where people gather for a chat. Usually a paan is taken after a meal but addicts chew paan all day, often adding a few grains of aromatic tobacco called 'zarda'. It is surprising how these little commercial set ups with their brass containers lined in front are keeping alive a culture that originated centuries ago.



Types of Paan Leaf

There are a variety of betels leaves grown in different parts of India and the method of preparation also differs. The delicately flavoured Paan from Bengal is known as 'Desi Mahoba'. Paan prepared from small and fragile leaves from South India is known as Chigrlayele. The thicker black paan leaves – the Ambadi and Kariyele are more popular and are chewed with tobacco. There are others like Magahi, Jagannathi, Sanchi, Kalkatta etc. The best one is called 'Magahi' from the region of Magadh, which is in Bihar, India.



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and stems of all paan leaves are first broken or cut before preparation. They can be cut with knives, scissors or by hand depending upon the convenience of the Paanwala.

Most of the Paan leaves are named after the region where it is grown. For example 'Magahi' is the Paan grown in the region of Magadh, present day Bihar, 'Kalkatta' is grown in West Bengal, 'Jagannathi' comes from Jagannath Puri in Orissa and so on. These betel leaves differ in quality. Certain leaves like 'Kalkatta' are thick and have thicker veins, which make them bitter. Whereas some leaves like 'Magahi' are very fine and small, which makes them melt in the mouth and taste sweeter. Leaves which are thicker sometimes are cut into half and generally vein endings

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'Banarasi Paan' is very famous across the world. It is actually the preparation of Paan which is called the 'Banarasi Paan' and Paan is not grown in Banaras. 'Magahi' and 'Jagannathi' leaves are mainly used by the Paanwalas of Banaras or Varanasi. Paan leaves are actually baked in Varanasi. Leaves brought from other places are baked in small furnaces in Banaras, to make them stay for longer period of time.

Types of Paan Preparation

The traditional art of assembling a Paan, storing and serving is interesting. The leaves are stored wrapped in a moist, red colored cloth. To serve, a leaf is removed from the wrapping cloth, de-veined, and kattha and lime paste is generously applied on its surface. This is topped with tiny pieces of betel nuts, cardamom saffron, roasted coconut pieces/powder, cloves, tobacco etc., according to the eater's personal preferences. Based on the number of Paans to be made, the Paanwala lays out the leaves neatly in front of him. Some of them make 2-3 Paans at a time and some others chose to make 20-25 Paans simultaneously to save time, depending on the order. The leaf is then folded in a special manner into a triangle and is ready to be eaten.

Paan varieties are classified according to the ingredients and the taste.

The major types are 'Sada' that is plain and 'Meetha' which is sweet. 'Sada' Paan consists of betel leaf smeared with 'Chuna' or lime and 'Kattha' that is a reddish solution derived from the wood of the tree Acacia Catechu. Supari (Areca nut), Lavang (clove) and Elaichi (Cardamom) are then placed on the leaf before it is rolled. Many people also prefer the Paan leaf just with Chuna and Katha.

'Meetha' Paan on the other hand contains several things to sweeten the Paan. The range of ingredients varies from Paanwala to Paanwala. At times the preparation is too elaborate. For instance, some Paanwalas add dry fruits, chocolate, jelly sweets etc. to make the Paan richer.

Sometimes Meetha Paan can also be as simple as leaf, chuna and katha only. Like in Allahabad, some Paanwalas did not add any sweetening agents in the Meetha Paan. They use separate Katha for both the types of Paan. For sada paan the Katha will be plain and for Meetha Paan it will be sweet.

Depending on individual preference the Paan may contain Zarda (tobacco). People get addicted to Paan because of the tobacco content in their Paan. Zarda and processed areca nut are supposed to be carcinogenic and increase the risk of cancer highly.

Glimpses of Paan Preparation



Ingredients

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Ingredients of a Paan can vary with the person preparing it. The basic contents of a Sada Paan are Betel leaf, Chuna, Katha, Supari, Lavang and Elaichi.

also contains dry fruits, honey, chocolate etc.

Zarda paan ingredients: Betel leaf, Chuna, katha, Supari, Lavang, Elaichi, Zarda and Paan masala.

Range of ingredients for Meetha Paan can be vast. For example: Betel leaf, Chuna, Katha, Supari, Lavang, Elaichi, Gulkand (Rose pulp), shredded coconut, Saunf, sugar coated saunf, Hari patti, Mint, shredded/processed Areca nut, Jelly, Jelly sweets, Cherry and Gulabjal or rose water. Meetha paan sometimes

Paan vendors buy betel leaves from wholesale markets which are commonly called 'Paan ka Dariba'. In big cities like Mumbai ingredients are generally ready made and bought from stores/wholesale markets. The traditional stores in smaller places like Allahabad prefer to make their own ingredients, which is also at times their trade secret.

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Saada paan is also called a "Beeda" and meetha paan is known as a "Gilouri" in north India.

Folding of Paan



Folding and packaging of paan also requires great skill. It varies from person to person. Even these skills become a trade mark of particular Paanwalas and people remember him by his way of presenting Paan.



After placing the ingredients on the paan leaf, he folds the paan from three sides to make a triangular beeda. Sometimes it is also locked with a clove pierced through the layers. At times the meetha paan is also covered in edible silver leaf (vark). New paanwalas also have some innovative ways of folding the paan, where they fold the paan only once and cut and fold the edges to create beautiful patterns.

These pictures show the steps of folding a Paan.



Offering & Packaging



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Traditionally the Paanwalas used to put the beeda directly in a person's mouth. It is thought to be a mark of respect and hospitality. Even today many paanwalas continue to do the same. They pick a Paan, dip it in sweet jelly then dip it in gulabjal, roll it in coconut powder and place the paan directly in the customer's mouth. Although most of the paanwaalas do not do this anymore. In weddings, beedas of Paan are placed on big silver plates and decorated with flowers before they are offered to guests.

Packaging of paan depends on the paanwaala. In Allahabad, paan is packed in big leaves and sealed with tiny sticks. They also sprinkle gulabjal before sealing the leaf packets. In Mumbai, some paanwalas pack their paan in newspapers and plastic wraps, cut neatly in square shape. Before sealing the newspaper, they put a little chuna at the ends. This chuna sticks the newspaper and the customer gets some extra chuna as well.



Why do people spit Paan?



Streets in India are always covered with red splatter of paan spit. People generally spit paan after chewing it for some time. After asking many people the reason for spitting out the red juice was found that people consider the juice to be hazardous if swallowed.



A myth goes that a lot of snakes live in the farms of betel leaf. People believe that if paan is swallowed, it can be poisonous. Meetha paan is swallowed most of the times because generally it does not contain tobacco. According to some people, they chew the paan for three to four minutes before spitting for the first time. Then they continue chewing and spitting for as long as they want. Some can chew paan for all day long and others finish their paan quickly and go for another paan in an hour or two. People addicted to paan, can

have ten to twelve paans in a day. People who are not habituated to paan find it difficult to have more than one paan in a day. People also have different ways of spitting. Spitting paan juice is considered to be a skill and although people care about the cleanliness of the city, they can't help but spit anywhere and everywhere whenever they have their mouths full of the red Paan juice.



Paanwala



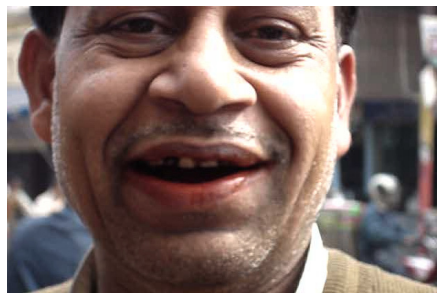
Paanwalas
from Mumbai
and Allahabad

A skilled paan maker/seller is known in North India as a 'Paanwala'. Many people believe that their paanwala is the best, considering it an art that takes practice and expert touch. Some Paanwalas are new to the business and others come from the family of Paan makers and learn the art from their fathers and grandfathers. The Paanwala has always been a significant part of the Indian society. He is the person whom many people meet everyday, a number of times. He remembers all his customers and their tastes. Most of the people do not need to specify their choice of Paan, as the Paanwala remembers them all. Sitting at one place he cheerfully serves Paan to everyone taking Rs. 2 to Rs. 8 in return, depending the Paan.

Most of the Paanwalas have a big moustache and a red vermilion

'Tilak' on their foreheads. There is a smile on their lips reddened with Paan. Most of them wear traditional clothes like 'Dhoti' and 'Kurta'. This is the typical image of a Paanwala in our minds. The Paanwala is always smiling and chatting with everyone. He keeps his workspace clean, fragrant with incense sticks and decorated with flowers. Every Paan shop has a small place for pictures of Gods and Goddesses. The Paanwala is very fond of music and always has a radio playing behind him while he is at work. His hands move swiftly when he cuts the Supari with a nut cracker, mixes Katha in a pot, cuts the leaves and prepares a Paan in no time, while he is talking to his customers or talking on a mobile phone. The innumerable Paanwalas of India add to the richness of our age old culture.

Paanwala speaks



Mr. Vijay (Sharda Paan Bhandar, Allahabad) (top); Bholanath ji (Allahanad) (bottom)

Conversations with several Paanwalas in Mumbai and Allahabad, brought out a number of interesting informations which have been mentioned in this report. Most of the Paanwalas in Mumbai are from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. They were avoiding cameras because they are scared of media these days. It was difficult to convince them to speak to the documentation team and let them record a video. On the contrary, the Paanwalas in Allahabad were happy to give interview and come on camera. Some of them also came dressed up in traditional 'Pagdi' for the video shoot.

From them we came to know about Paan eating trends in both the cities. In Mumbai, more people prefer Paan masala and Mava (tobacco mixed with chuna) over real Paan. Whereas, in Allahabad most of the people are

real Paan enthusiasts. Paan shops in Allahabad do not sell peripheral items like Paan masala, Guthka, cigarette, Mava etc. They only serve different varieties of Paan.

Telling us about the use of red cloth for covering Paan leaves, one Paanwala said that it was to hide the stains of Katha and red colour is the symbol of Paan. About the use of Chuna in Paan, another Paanwala said, "The way we add salt to our food, we should add chuna to our Paan to reduce its bitterness". Talking about the craze of Paan in Allahabad, someone laughed and said, "You will not find white teeth in Allahabad, all will be red, black and yellow."

Documentary

The story of Paan can be told through different media. It can be in the form of a book, a game, installation, interactive product or a video. The medium of film was chosen because it gives the freedom of showing movement and sound. The paan shop is a hub of continuous activity and different kinds of sounds. Video is also an appropriate medium to show the making of paan, music at the paan shop and people talking. The experience of a paan shop and taste of paan can be effectively conveyed by this medium. Videos captured during the process of documentation were compiled into a short documentary film.

The process of making paan is not unknown to people. The objective of this documentary was to present the same activities in a new and interesting manner. The idea was to

make the viewer see paan in a new light. Linear narration of the story of Paan could be monotonous for the viewer because he/she is acquainted with it. The story becomes interesting when there are uncertainty in it. Non-linear narration of any story makes it interesting for the viewer/listener. The story of paan was to be presented in one such way.

The key thoughts were first listed down. Various stages in the process were laid down and then the ideation was done with matching and deliberate mismatching of events in a sequence. So as to create a sense of interest and surprise as the film proceeds. Since sound plays a major role in generating the exact environment and evoking the same experience, original sound track were mixed with the narration and appropriate music.

Narration

Paan, being a part of ancient Indian traditions, is considered to be a symbol of grace and hospitality. It is almost a poetic object and has been a favorite of poets and artists of India. Therefore, the medium of poetic narration was chosen as the background for the documentary. This medium could reflect the essence of Paan and the character of its patrons appropriately.

The script was written keeping in mind, the thoughts of a paanwala and someone who loves paan. The ingredients have been romanticized and paan is described as if a beautiful girl was being described. The process of adding the ingredients have been looked at with anticipation of taste they would create when the paan is complete.

Poetic narration has been mixed with original sound tracks and interviews of paanwalas, to bring together the world of poetry and reality. Voice of the narrator suits the poetic narration.

Music

Paan and Paanwala reminds of Folk Music of North India and qawaalis. The mixture of harmonium and dholak creates a base for this kind of music. There is a continuous background score throughout the film which changes from folk to qawaali time to time. This background music acts as a link between the various sequences of the film.

Analysis

The attempt was to create uncertainty at certain points in the film. The film was analyzed to find out how much could be improved to make the film more interesting. At most of the places, music acts just as a link between scenes. It does not compliment the activity shown in the scenes. At some places it does convey the speed of activities but is not consistent throughout the film. There is a continuous poetic narration throughout the film but when it comes to the end, there is no narration for almost 30 seconds which is quite monotonous. Original tracks in between narration, at times create interest but most of the time, they seem unnecessary. The quality of video could have been better provided better circumstances and equipments. Detailed analysis of the film is as follows.

Story Board & Analysis



Ye Lal Rang



Duniya mein yun toh khair hazaaron kism ke jaadu honge, magar jo baat ek gilauri mein hai, woh aur kahaan.

Kya ta-aajjub ki hum duniya ko bhool jate hain. Yeh kambakht cheez hi aisi hai.

“Ye Allahabad ki vishesh pehchaan hai. Subah kulla karne se pehle...”
(Person speaking)

Sakht Badan Supari jab Saraute ki giraft mein aati hai, aur hazaaron baareeq tukdon mein kat jati hai.

Paan ki hari-hari pattiyan laal nam pairahan mein bheegti dekhi hain kabhi? Pehli baarish mein bheegti kisi gulnaar haseena se kam nahin lagti.

Scene 1
Entrance in the surroundings of a paan shop. The viewer is lead to a crowded street of Allahabad, with a narration which builds up curiosity about the subject of the film. But ‘Gilauri’ (Paan) being said in the first line, does not leave anything uncertain for the people who know the word.

Scene 2
Blank screen comes as the first break in the sequence of visuals. Narration increases the anticipation. The title ‘Ye Laal Rang’ does not give away the secret. It only gives a hint about something red in colour and poetic.

Scene 3
In this scene a person from Allahabad speaks about something that is important in his city. The viewer is still not told what is the object in question. Narration shifts from poetic Urdu to local language. This is a point of high uncertainty.

Scene 4
This is the first time the viewer is introduced to a Paan shop. Instead of showing the Paan directly, the process of cutting supari has been shown as an element of surprise. This is followed by mixing of Kattha.

Scene 5
This is the scene when paan is finally shown for the first time. Background score shifts from Qawwali to soft folk tune, with the word ‘Paan’ being said for the first time. This scene is followed by washing of Paan leaves which is complemented by the poetic narration.



Badan itna narm ki ungaliaan hi fisal jaein. Hum jab haath mein ise uthate hain to khaas khyaal rakhte hain ki kahin iske jism par kharaash na aa jae.

Scene 6

Here we see the process of mixing chuna and kattha on the leaf with the narration describing the softness of a paan leaf. The visual is long but the narration created interest.



Kya nazara hota hai jab Paan ke naazuk se patte par Paan-farosh ki ungaliaan narmiyat bhari larzish se Katthe ko choone mein milati hain.

Scene 7

There is a collage of visuals of different paanwalas doing the same activity. This sequence is a continuity of the previous scene and there is a repetition of the same kind of visual. Narration builds the link between the scenes. This sequence ends abruptly with original sound track, which breaks the continuity but also creates interest in the audio. This sequence is long and narration can be complicated for many people.



Iski zard rangat gawahi hai us asar ki jo yeh honthon pe karne ki taiyyari mein hai.

Scene 8

Poetic narration and resumes with this scene. This time there are people eating paan. This sequence does not lead to the forthcoming scene. It stands alone.



“Magahi muh mien dalte hi ghul jayega. Maheen Paan hota hai.”
(Paanwala speaking)

Scene 9

Narration breaks with the dialogues of a paanwala giving information about magahi paan. The content is factual and precise, therefore creates interest.



Saunf ke har katre mein
chhupi taaza khushboo is
mein milke aur bhi pur-
asar ho jati hai.

Scene 10

This scene begins with
the sequence of addition
of ingredients on Paan.



Baareek katri hui zaafraani
supari paan ke zaayke mein
beshumar izaafa kar
deti hai.

Scene 11

Continuation of the
previous scene. Addition
of the ingredients has been
shown in a linear fashion.



Original track.
Music on radio.

Scene 12

Sequence of visuals and
narration break abruptly.
This scene does not help
in creating uncertainty.



Us sakht supari par
jab narm jelly ke
tukde girte hain to dil
dhadak sa jata hai.

Scene 13

Continuation of the
previous scene with
new ingredients.



Phir aata hai meethi
chaashni se bhara Gulkand
jo mano kisi mausam ki
tarah sab kuchh apne aagosh
mein le leta hai.

Scene 14

Continuation of the
previous scene with
new ingredient. Video
and narration together
creates an anticipation
of the taste.



Dil abhi sambhal bhi nahin pata ki ispe surkh laal Cherry rakh di jati hai. Cherry ki shaql mein hamara dil, lamha dar lamha is Gulkand mein doobta chala jata hai.

Scene 15

Continuation of the previous scene with a new ingredient. By this time the paan is almost ready. It looks good and seems delicious to the viewer. Background music changes to create a sense of importance in this scene.



Original track.
Music on radio.

Scene 16

Original track breaks the monotony of narration and helps in creating the experience of a paan shop.



Paan-farosh kisi fankaar ki tarah, behad furti se iss patte ko mod kar Gilauri ki shaql de deta hai, goya koi sang-taraash kisi mujassame ko Badan de raha ho.

Scene 17

Background music becomes fast and indicates the beginning of a new sequence. It also conveys the speed of activities. Fast music complements the act of quick folding of Paan.



Bheegi hui supari, gari ka buraada, zara si saunf, khaas zaafraani chatni aur Panwaari ka khaas fan jab milte hain, to asar lazmi hai.

Scene 18

This scene acts as a revision of ingredients and process of making paan.



Change in background music.
Song- "Bushman pehene, khayeke bida paan...'

Scene 19
Change in background score brings in freshness. People chewing and spitting paan have been shown in this sequence.

"Chacha ko hi dekh lijiye, satta saal ke ho gaye lekin paan gulgulane mien koi kami nahi hai."

"Allahabad mien bahut kam safed daant dekhne ko milega. Sab lal pile nile nazar aayenge beta."
(Person speaking)

Scene 20
In this scene people are speaking about paan which creates interest.

No narration. Only background music (folk tune).

Scene 21
In this sequence there is no narration. There is just background music which plays on for 30 seconds. It is a long monotonous sequence. The flow of poetic narration breaks for a very long period. The visuals show packaging of paan and faces of paanwalas.

Lijiye saahab taiyaar hai Gilauri aapke haathon mein aane ke liye. Ise munh mein rakhne ki zehmat adaa farmaaiye, aur khud ko paiye zaayqe, khushboo aur rangat ke azeem samandar mein.

Scene 22
The paan is ready in the end and ready to be eaten. The aim of this scene was to make the viewer feel like eating it. The paan is being offered by the paanwala. Quality of video is not able to evoke the desired experience in the viewer. Narration continues till the end of the credits.

Concluding Remarks

This documentation involved understanding of the subject by being a part of it. It began with eating Paan, observing the shop, the Paanwala and the activities around him. Curiosity and fascination guided us through every step of this project. The process of documentation and making the film led to the realisation that, to tell a story we need to have a point of view. Being a part of the environment and staying immersed in the subject helped us in developing a point of view. This project made us more observant of our surroundings and the minute details which we tend to take for granted. We eventually learnt how to turn something common into something new and interesting, through the way we tell the story.

Image sources

Pic. 1: www.sepiamutiny.com

Pic. 2: www.flickr.com

Pic. 3: www.indianfoodrecepies.com

Pic. 4: www.trekearth.com

Pic. 5: www.realfresh.co.in

Pic. 6: www.flickr.com

Pic. 7: www.notfortourists.com

All the other photographs used in this report have been taken by Divya Saxena and Soumya Tiwari.

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