

Chai CONVERSATIONS

Visual Communication Project 2

by

Shiba Sheikh

VC- 08625805

Guide: Raja Mohanty

November, 2009

Industrial Design Centre, IIT Bombay





Approval Sheet

The Visual Communication Project 2 entitled
"Chai Conversation" by Shiba Sheikh.
08625805 is approved of the Masters Design
degree in Visual Communication.

Guide: 

Chairperson: 

Internal Examiner: 

External Examiner: 

November, 2009

Industrial Design Centre, IIT Bombay

Declaration

I declare that this written submission represents my ideas in my own words and where others' ideas or words have been included, I have adequately cited and referenced the original sources. I also declare that I have adhered to all principles of academic honesty and integrity and have not misrepresented or fabricated or falsified any idea/data/fact/ source in my submission. I understand that any violation of the above will be cause for disciplinary action by the Institute and can also evoke penal action from the sources which have thus not been properly cited or from whom proper permission has not been taken when needed.

Signature



Name of the student: Shiba Sheikhi

Roll No: 08625805

Date: November, 2009



Acknowledgements

My deepest and sincerest gratitude towards
Raja Mohanty, my guide.

To Pune
To Ma, Pa and Misba
To Priyanka, Giri, Su, Roshu, Vinie, Hari Cheta
To Girish and Vallu
To Ajay

To Venkat for technical support and gyaan

To Rajendra, Manav Kaul, Sakshi for being
themselves and a part of Chai Conversations

All at IDC who have in some way or other
helped me get through the past few months and
the sleepless nights.



Contents

Prologue	1	Chapter 2 Conflict	10	Chapter 3 Resolution	26
Chapter 1 Setting	2	Video as a Medium	11	Synopsis	28
Chai	3	Ram Madhwani	12	Why 3 Parts?	29
Introduction	5	Initial Direction	15	Short Video	30
Chai Conversation	6	How this is associated with chai conversation?	16	Part I—Salaries, Farmers and Equality	31
The Way of Tea	7	Salaries, Farmers and Equality	17	Part II—Chemistry	33
Observe and Learn	8	What is caste?	18	Part III—With or without milk/Emptiness	35
Srinivas	9	Does caste have a future?	19	Title Sequence	37
		Equality	20	Further work	38
		Human/Political Equality	21	“A film gets made three times”	39
		Synopsis	22	Tools	40
		Chai Conversations	23	Epilogue	41
		Another Possibility	24	Reference	4



Prologue

Recipe for 2 cups of Chai

Water approximately

Milk approximately

Chai powder approximately

Ginger

Cardamom

Cheeni Dil se

Boil water. Add Chai powder
Add crushed ginger and cardamom. Boil till the
colour of water becomes dark brown and you
begin to get a whiff of spices. Switch off gas.
Shut the container with a lid.

Keep aside for a while. Boil milk. Add the tea
concoction, milk and cheeni dil se.
Chai is ready for two!

My father taught me how to make Chai
at a very young age, he never followed a
set measured recipe. Add everything
approximately he would say and yet we
would have exact two cups of Chai.

Ah! it is since then I have fond memories of
making and drinking chai.

Chai, to me is about that particular time of the
day when people left what they did to just catch
a breath, unwind and talk about the world
going by.



Chapter 1

Setting

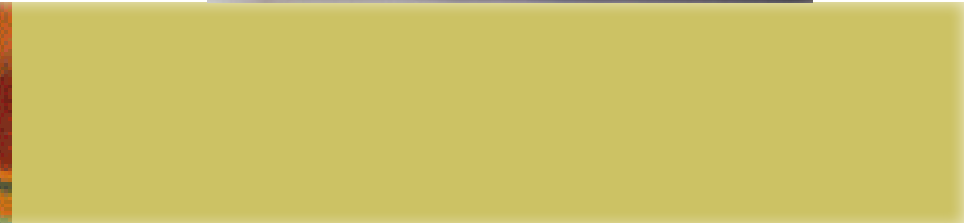
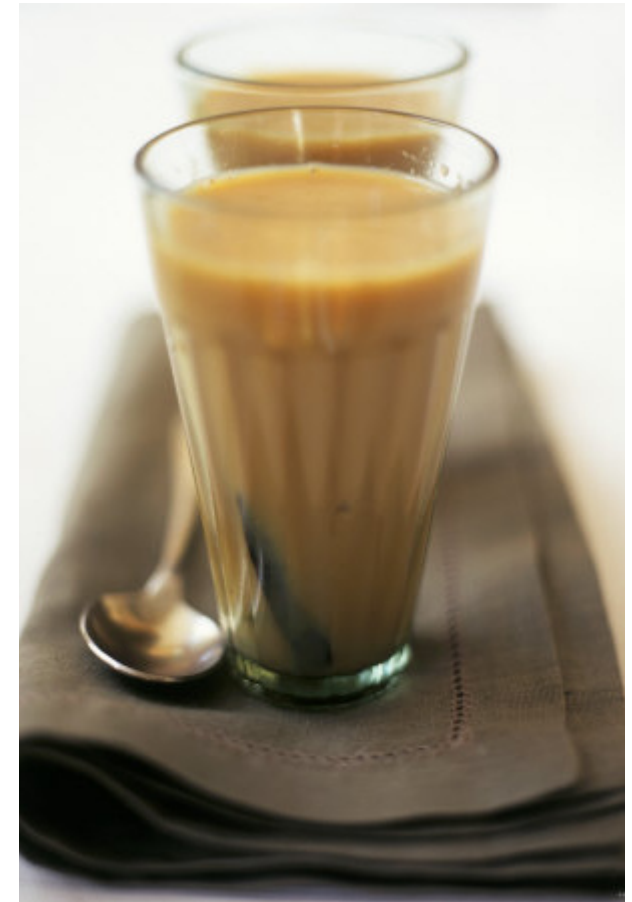


Chai

Chai is merely the generic word for tea in Hindi and many other languages around the world, but for many English speakers outside those regions, particularly in the Western hemisphere, “chai” automatically implies “masala chai”. The traditional chai-brewing process actively boils the tea leaves over sustained heat. Chai prepared in this manner has a caffeine level higher than most teas, as the prolonged boiling produces a more robust beverage than quiescently steeping the tea leaves in hot (but not boiling) water.

Chai has no rules. You can make it the way you like. Drink it the way you like. Hey, even drink it whenever you like. It’s got no stiff upper lip rituals and spares you the embarrassment of not knowing the difference between a mocha and a macchiato.

It’s no wonder then that this quaint, traditional Indian concoction has evolved from a common man’s beverage to a whole new way of life for today’s young and old. The flavour of chai may change from one region to another, but the ease at which it brings people together never will.



**Conversation is the
laboratory and workshop
of the student.**

-Ralph Waldo Emerson



Introduction

The seeds of Chai Conversation were sown a couple of years back when I was in Pune doing my graduation. There was a small “Tapri” outside college where Muasi brewed kadak Chai and fried crispy Bhajjis for a few regulars. This ritual does sound familiar, doesn't it? .

It is.

It is something everyone has experienced at some point or the other but somehow the wonderful conversations that we all had about life and possibilities have all gotten lost somewhere.

Chai Conversation is about the warm feeling that sinks in while sipping Chai and sharing few moments of the day with friends, colleagues, strangers or just yourself.

To some it is a ritual, to some an excuse to catch up, to some a time to unwind and be alone with their thoughts and to a lot a time to break away from their mundane monotony.

A tea break is essentially to give you some time off and let you restart your systems to get back to what we are really suppose to do. The way I look at it now is that actually this is the time when most of us talk about what we really want to do than have to do. When we get most creative with reality.

My journey from here on has been to learn from, observe and talk to different people who shared the common feeling of warmth when they sat to have wonderful Chai Conversations.

Hence, one solemn request to the ones who got intrigued by my project title and have started to browse through what is suppose to be a report, to not treat the coming pages as a document but a realisation of a series of fortunate and unfortunate events. It has taken shape through a number of insightful and wonderful conversations with colorful and contrasting people who love Chatting over Chai at any point of the day.



Chai Conversation

Initial exploration

It was pretty much clear that Chai Conversation as a subject itself had to be about Chai Conversation and people. What shape it would take in terms of medium and what exactly it would say is something that took shape over a period of time.

The essence was always about people coming together. Initial explorations involved learning a bit of pottery and reading about the Tea ceremony.

The way of Tea

Everyone looks at things, but people do not perceive in the same manner. Some are able to penetrate into the depths of things, but most see only the surface, and objects are usually categorized as right or wrong. To misapprehend is no better than not to notice. Though everyone says he sees things, how few can see

things as they are. Among these few are found the early masters of the Way of Tea. They had deep-seeing eyes. They could comprehend intuitively. And with this penetration, they saw truth.

What, then, did the Tea masters see- what did their vision disclose? It was the reflection of the inner nature of things, the reality of things, which the old philosophers called “the eternal mode”. They saw the thing itself, the whole, which is entirely different from the sum total of the parts. The whole is indivisible; it cannot be divided. To see the whole, directly means to see before thinking, without time for analysis or discrimination. If we look things with our thoughts, we see only a portion, and if we use intellect before we see, understanding is superficial. More can be learned through the power of seeing the whole directly than through intellection. There is a passage in a religious book that reads: “He who would know before he believeth cometh never to the true knowledge of God”. It is the same with the beautiful. Those



The way of Tea

who employ intellect before they see are denied a real comprehension of beauty. Before all else, old masters of Tea saw.

The manner of choice is decisive, and the manner of use enlivens or kills. Misuse is worse than non-use, yet there are more ways than one to use things. The changing of the seasons, the alternation of morning and evening, the very rooms, the personalities of articles themselves- all these call for an endless creativeness. Utensils have to wait for men just as men wait for them. It may be easy to use things, but how many know how to use them? True men of tea adapted things onto their most intimate lives and mastered them. From seeing things they went on to using them. That they lived beauty in their practical life is truly their greatest service.

Tea is, therefore, the Way. Since it is the Way, it is universal. It is a law to which one naturally conforms. Tea does not admit personal likes and dislikes. It is not such a shallow thing as to

trifle with individual tastes. The Way of tea transcends the individual. Its law is the beauty of Tea. Tea that expresses individuality cannot be the right Tea. It must belong to all. It is not a private path, but a highway for humanity.

Thus Tea has been referred to as ceremony. A ceremony presupposes ritual pattern. Having universality and become ritual, it can now claim a name, the Way of Tea. This Way claims our service. The ritual of Tea has invested it with authority, and its disciples must be loyal and obedient to the ritual. Some may regard obedience as a restraint, but to obey a law is to conform to it, and that is absolute liberty. Liberty must not be confused with willfulness. Perfect freedom lies only in observing the law. Willfulness is the heaviest of fetters; self-assertion binds us hand and foot. Ceremonial Tea is the road to freedom. Here, and here only, can be found the profound significance of all the traditional arts. In what other forms can we find both the beauty of the No drama and the art of the Kabuki theatre? Every new thing is

admittedly destined to stabilization in its own form, which in the course of its development it will naturally acquire. Tea attains its consummate beauty in its forms. Tea devotees must respect the law. The longevity of Tea depends solely on the existence of these forms. Tea ceremony continues forever, unaffected by the death of the founder or the coming and going of successive masters. It is super-human; time cannot efface it. Many a false Tea master may succeed, yet Tea as a form will remain unchanged. If it had not been raised to a ritual, its history might long since have run its course. A thing limited to individuals is but short lived.



All of us are watchers-of-
television, of time clocks,
of traffic on the freeway-
but few are observers.
Everyone is looking, not
many are seeing.

- Peter M. Leschak



Observe and Learn

Until this point Chai for me was still a very personal experience and it was very important for me see and witness if what I am feeling is something everyone feels or is their something I am missing out on.

I went around the city, from one Chai shop to other. Famous Irani Café's that serve Chai to local Chai wallas who sell it on cycles. It was a very unique experience to see different kinds of people selling Chai and making a living out of it. How people came together and the kind of friendships that have grown over a period of time. Each Chai experience was different.

What I realized was most of the Chai shops or Tapri's existed as individual organisms. Which breathed life and catered to different kinds of people with customized Chai according to the kind of work they did. They are hot spots of social interaction and networking and often the Chai walla (the person who makes the Chai) is a kind of central hub, who keeps track

of regulars who come at particular times of the day and shares a bond developed over years of knowing one another.

Chai drinking even as an activity to just observe is very insightful. Some like being alone , some come in groups of two or three. Some make conversation with random strangers and some make conversation with the Chai walla about the day gone by.

Rush hours depend according to the places these Shops and restaurants are situated. Office districts have more people frequently coming. The ones at railways stations are always throbbing with people. The mobile vendors are the most interesting especially the ones who deliver personally to various shop keepers (grocery stores etc) as there daily wages depend on the number of cups of chai they sell and make 10 % on each sale, each cup costs Rs.3.



Srinivas

On one such occasion while I was roaming the streets with my Video Camera and sipping on my 10th cup of Chai of the day, something truly unexpected happened. I bumped into Srinivas, one of the many helpers working at the Chai Tapri which was exactly 4ft by 4ft. The Main Chai walla stood inside and all you could see was his upper body mechanically stirring the hot boiling Chai at regular intervals.

Srinivas has been working for him for the past 5 yrs selling Chai. Originally from Hydra bad. But what is special is he carries Chai in a steel container to all his regular clients as well as all over the business districts twice or thrice in a day meeting new people everytime. I got to follow Srinivas on one such occasion and watch him interact with his customers. Making his way through meandering streets and dingy corridors always with a smile on his face To watch this man so full of energy and listen to him narrate his life and love with the city was a remarkable experience.



Chapter 2

Conflict



The secret of getting ahead is getting started. The secret of getting started is breaking your complex overwhelming tasks into small manageable tasks, and then starting on the first one.
- Mark Twain



The best way to face your fears is to place yourself in exactly a situation where you have no choice but to deal with it. Even if you fail then at least you know for yourself that you made an attempt.

My first two attempts at making a short video were not exactly what I would want to remember, but like the old saying goes if you don't make mistakes you will never learn. First things first to understand what is it that you really want to say. Sequencing ones thoughts is essentially the real tact needed in making a meaningful video or film. To establish the subject and then accordingly gradually or randomly steering the audience to the point your trying to make. Video is a very complex medium which has the capability of at once capturing someones attention or in a fraction of a second make you want to shut it and switch to something else.

There are various cinematic devices which comes into the picture then to grab attention and make someone sit through something special you want to tell.

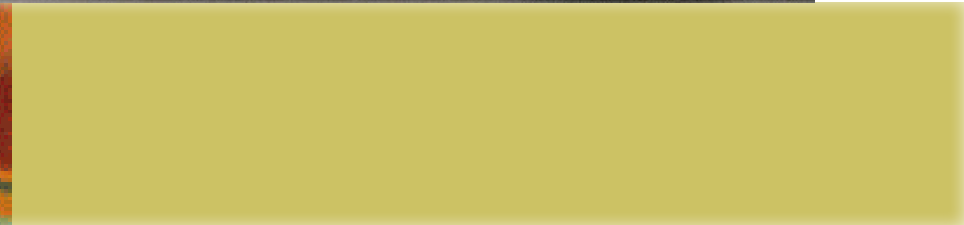
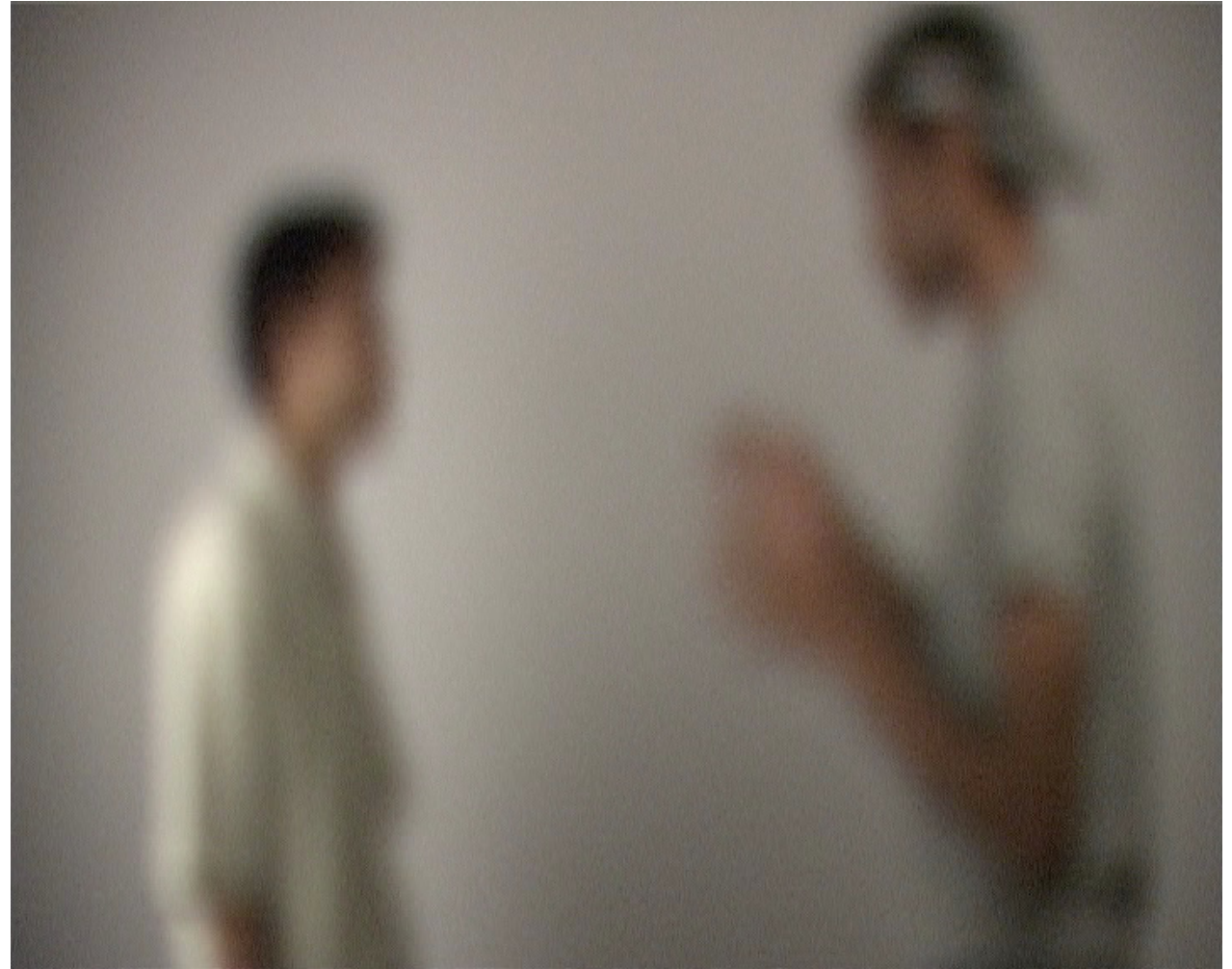


Video as a medium

When one begins on a journey towards understanding a particular subject it is always comforting to have a fuzzy image of what you see the eventual output as. It becomes the guiding light and helps maintain focus through trying times of understanding and gaining clarity.

The decision to work with video as a medium was a conscious one. Having no experience working with it, it did seem a bit over adventurous to start off with but every adventure story has trials, errors, action and suspense. A lot to learn from at every stage.

To capture the essence of what Chai Conversation truly meant only video could have done justice is what I felt intuitively. If, by the end of this project through this video I could make people get a sense of the warmth that people share spending few moments of the day drinking Chai and sharing a few thoughts, I would consider it to be a success or else an honest attempt at understanding Video as an extremely complex medium.



Ram Madhwani

It would be like any other lecture I thought when I first saw Ram Madhwani in an auditorium full of students. I had never heard of him or maybe it was just my plain ignorance. He showed his work first and then spoke. Which then made me sit up and pay attention. He has been working in the advertising industry for many years and has been making ad films. His recent famous work is the chlor mint ad with the tag line “Yeh jahan roshan”. What was so interesting about his talk? He had some very insightful things to say about film making which I thought gave me clarity at a time when I was grappling with my thoughts.

Like for instance, he began his talk by discussing the possibilities of bringing two completely unrelated entities together and then telling a story. In what way I would apply this to my video I didn't know then but it got me thinking of the potential this particular method had in generating assorted combinations to express one thought.

Thinking everything through to the minutest detail is what he said makes him the film maker he is. From the costumes to the lighting and animation. Being able to envision 95% of what is going to happen on screen gives him the confidence to expand his horizon of creativity.

Submerging yourself in the subject. To eat sleep and breath your subject and look for anything and everything related to it. It is the only way one can realize the Idea brewing in your head.

What is your voice?

Voice is the tone, the quality or the stand that you take and then articulate that through the medium. There is always an essence of something that gets communicated through your own voice, a world view that probably no one sees or everyone sees.



Initial direction...

We interact with so many people every day. We decide the order of their importance or how much they mean to us on the basis of many parameters. Family, friends, relatives, colleagues, acquaintances etc. On some level on the other we connect with them and share precious moments of our day. But there are many people we encounter in our day who happen to fall in the category of 'oh, not so important' category who's lives we never learn of and never acknowledge.



How this is associated with Chai Conversation?

One such person I have been in constant contact with is a humble Chai wala at the Tapri close to where I study. Every day at exactly 4 0 clock when its time to take a break few friends and I visit his Tapri to ingest his soulful Chai. It's the perfect concoction to wake you up from the monotony of the day.

It is placed just around the corner of a construction site. There is a gigantic concrete opus as its back drop and this tin shanty sustains the construction workers with its sweetly spiced Chai. It serves lunch and snacks also at appropriate times of the day. Professors and workers from other departments also frequent the place.

Rajendra the Chai maker is from Rajasthan, has been making and serving Chai for the past 15 years. He has been here in this particular location for the past two years. Him and his brother who also makes and serves Chai work with the construction company so where ever there is a building coming up they set up the Tapri to serve the construction workers. He in a way seemed like a modern day nomad in the big city. Against the back drop of the convention centre coming up his life seemed so insignificant.

To ones surprise he has an MA in political science and has very sorted worldviews. All this out of just one conversation with him over few cups of Chai gave impetus to a wonderful story that could unfold. People like him exist in the backdrop of our lives but our preoccupied minds of irrational sorrows never seems to care or wonder about what they think of us. The city that we live in. If we have similar concerns?



Salaries. Farmers. Equality

Serendipity is accidentally discovering something wonderful. On one such morning conversation with Rajendra really felt like that moment. When he opened up and spoke of real life issues that concerned him while making the first pot of Chai.

It was quite clear how extremely sorted he was in his views. A Brahmin by caste he belongs to the Bhatt sect. Serving Chai all his life is not what he aspired to do. An MA in political science one can sense a deep resentment towards the reservation system which gives privileges to the Schedule Caste category leaving out many like him who come under the general category fewer seats in colleges and competitive exams to fight for. He feels left out in the rat race and even now after fifteen years of doing what he doing hopes to see at least his three daughters will be well educated and independent.

He believes that there should be equality amongst all. A farmer is equal to a professor teaching in IIT. If a farmer doesn't sow seeds and grow food how will a professor eat and teach others. A farmer's physical labour is equivalent to what ever mental labour a professor invests hence they both deserve equal opportunities and equal liberties to choose how they would want to lead they lives.

The city is place everyone comes to make money or make a living. To make a living here but is not easy and life is very different from where he is originally from.

Most of what he had to say seemed like issues a lot of us also have thought about discussed with closed ones but they are issues that we often treat as that are outside of our circle of direct concern.



What is caste?*

It started off as a way of classifying people according to their temperaments for choosing some occupation.

Why is the notion of caste offensive?

The notion of caste as occupational preference is not offensive. The notion that it is inherited and cannot be changed is highly offensive. There is a widespread belief that caste is inherited. That is to say a person does not have a choice in the matter. If my parents were of a certain caste, I inherit that caste. This view when scrutinized is clearly absurd. Though children often follow the occupation of their parents, there are many children who do not. Therefore to insist that the child of a teacher should not learn cleaning and cooking and the child of a cleaner and cook should not be a teacher, is simply offensive to the notion of fundamental equality of all human beings.



Does caste have a future?

Yes as long as people seek to use it as a means to protect their privilege or their false-sense of self-esteem - caste will continue to have a future. However, it is also true those who believe that caste is inherited by birth will come across as clinging to inherited-privileges rather than an esteem that is earned.

Is inheritance wrong?

There is nothing wrong in inheritance - it is but natural that parents who toiled hard seek to bequeath their earnings and learnings to their offsprings. As long as the offsprings acquire not just the material riches but the invisible qualities (such as humility and hardwork) - inheritance is simply a force that allows the continuation of a tradition. A huge material inheritance however, brings with it a mistaken self-worth that needs to be transcended by the personal efforts of the inheritor.*



Equality

We live in corruption. There's no question about it. And if we are aware of ourselves, is it possible to move out of that bondage of corruption. Is it possible to live a very deep, profound, integral life, be a person who is whole, not broken up - is that possible? I do not know if you have ever asked that question of yourself: whether it is possible to live an integrated life. And to pursue to the very end of it, not just say, well, it is too tiresome, I am too lazy, and all the excuses, rationalizations that one invents.

And also the question of justice: you are beautiful, I am not; you look nice, I am not; you are very, very intelligent and I am not; you can exploit people, and I can't exploit people; you have wealth, fame and power, and I can never have it; you have vision and I have not; you have capacity, a sense of beauty, and I have not. So where is there justice? I am poor, living in a village, you live in towns, you are urbanised, sophisticated, clever, and I can never

be that. Should we not talk not of justice but of compassion. Not try to bring about equality. There is no such thing as equality. It sounds nice on a piece of stone called equality, but there is no equality in the world. So we are always trying to bring about equality which is democracy, apparently. Ninety per cent of the people in this country know nothing about anything and they are voting. Right? You know all this. Where is there justice? So if you could move away from that word altogether and find out whether one is capable of being compassionate: to love, not seek justice. You are tall, I am short, you are bright, and I am not, I am dull, you have everything, I have not, you have health, I am diseased.

So should we not look at this question, not from the point of view of justice, but a human being that has no love, no compassion is worse than an animal. And why is it in this country - don't say, does it exist in other countries, that's a political escape - we are talking about

this country, we, you and I, while we are here. When the speaker is abroad he talks about that country, those people. But in this country I wonder if human beings living in this lovely land, whether they love at all, whether you really love your wife, your children, or we don't know that at all. You have responsibility to your wife, to your children, send them off to school and that's the end of that; marry your daughters off, that's the end of that.

So do we know the quality of mercy, justice - mercy, love and compassion? If that doesn't exist there is no justice. Compassion has its own intelligence, not the intelligence of a clever mind, of a clever brain.

J.Krishnamurthi



Human and Political Equality

Democracy comes into being as degenerating oligarchy. Oligarchs are rich, fat, and lazy. “Democracy comes about when the poor are victorious, killing some of their opponents and expelling others, and giving the rest an equal share in ruling under the constitution, and for the most part assigning people to positions of rule by lot.” (Rep., 557a-b)

Democracy is characterized by great freedom in every sense, where a person can do anything he wishes or wills to do. It is the form of government in which one finds people of all varieties.

“And what about the city’s tolerance? Isn’t it so completely lacking in small-mindedness that it utterly despises the things we took so seriously when we were founding our city, namely, that unless someone had transcendent natural gifts, he’d never become good unless he played the right games and followed a fine way of life from early childhood? Isn’t it magnificent the

way it tramples all this underfoot, by giving no thought to what someone was doing before he entered public life and by honoring him if only he tells them that he wishes the majority well?

The democratic man always surrenders to his desires, allowing those desires to rule over him.

Plato



Synopsis

Chai conversations is a short video that records a brief conversation with Rajendra a chai-maker at the tapri that serves the construction workers building the convention centre at IIT Bombay. Surprisingly it turns out that Rajendra holds an MA degree in political science and is a poor Brahmin with interesting views on professor's salaries, farmers and reservation policies of the government. He has dreams for his children that are grounded with a sense of his realities. The video explores notions of caste, equality and the challenges facing a new India.*



Chai conversations

Draft one

First sequence starts with a narrative against the background of the city.

A city is an organism. Throbbing with life. This life exists in vivid contrasts that is so visibly remarkable. Sky scrapers and shanties spreading, rising and falling to make room for a new cranny to get occupied with a vision of a developing city, ever changing.

Development they say comes with a price. To each it may differ. More parking space = No gardens. More cars = Traffic jams = Pollution. Some how we have managed to conveniently disorient ourselves and believe that its ok to even have to pay a price, even if it leads to depression, bad health conditions and lower life expectancy.

One would rather watch TV while having dinner. Listen to music while traveling. Talk on the phone while driving.

In a city where you are surrounded by hundreds of people would you smile at even one stranger and acknowledge their being. When was the last time we thanked an auto wala. Said good morning to the watch man or even smiled at the chaiwala at the tapri.

-Introducing Rajendra making chai.

-Rajendra speaking.

-Narration that says rajendra like many people came to the city to make a living.

-Introduce his story and why the tapri is there for the construction workers making the building behind the tapri

-His way of thinking: because of the money he makes he has just enough to keep the home

fire burning he knows this city is not his home and he is here to make a living

-His take on equality (and connected with that earnings of a professor and a farmer)

-His take on Gandhi

-The days of the tapri are numbered because the building is nearing completion. (did not ask him about what the building was all about).

_Tapri is coming down. show him leaving for a new place.

Duration roughly about 15 minutes.



Another Possibility...

Keeping in mind the original thought of people connecting and sharing a sense of warmth over a cup of Chai another possibility in terms of what all could be explored to show the same.

What if instead of the focus being on just one story about a Chai wala and a conversation with him about his views there were few more conversations between different people in various situations.

A three to four part sequence where each part is dedicated to a different kind of conversation. Each complete on its own but together essentially focusing on the theme.

Part 1
Salaries, farmers and reservation

Part 2
Chemistry

Part 3
With or without milk

Salaries, farmers and reservation is a part carried forward from the earlier idea, where notions of Equality and caste system through the eyes of a common like Rajendra – Chai maker is looked at .

Chemistry is about two people who enjoy each others company don't necessarily need a subject to discuss. Anything under the sun makes an interesting conversation. The constant flow of cups of Chai is the only witness to the time going by.

With or without milk is about a particular time of the day when few friend gather to take a break form work. They make Chai for one another and settle down to discuss their future and life. Such is the joy of being young, optimistic and in college.



Chapter 3

Resolution



काँच की बरनी और दो कप चाय — एक बोध कथा

जीवन में जब सब कुछ एक साथ और जल्दी-जल्दी करने की इच्छा होती है, सब कुछ तेजी से पा लेने की इच्छा होती है, और हमें लगने लगता है कि दिन के चौबीस घंटे भी कम पड़ते हैं, उस समय ये बोध कथा, “काँच की बरनी और दो कप चाय” हमें याद आती है।

दर्शनशास्त्र के एक प्रोफेसर कक्षा में आये और उन्होंने छात्रों से कहा कि वे आज जीवन का एक महत्वपूर्ण पाठ पढ़ाने वाले हैं... उन्होंने अपने साथ लाई एक काँच की बड़ी बरनी (जार) टेबल पर रखा और उसमें टेबल टेनिस की गेंदें डालने लगे और तब तक डालते रहे जब तक कि उसमें एक भी गेंद समाने की जगह नहीं बची ... उन्होंने छात्रों से पूछा — क्या बरनी पूरी भर गई ?

हा ... आवाज आई ... फिर प्रोफेसर साहब ने छोटे-छोटे कंकर उसमें भरने शुरू किये, धीरे-धीरे बरनी को हिलाया तो काफ़ी सारे कंकर उसमें जहाँ जगह खाली थी, समा गये, फिर से प्रोफेसर साहब ने पूछा, क्या अब बरनी भर गई है, छात्रों ने एक बार फिर हाँ। कहा अब प्रोफेसर साहब ने रेत की थैली से हौले-हौले उस बरनी में रेत डालना शुरू किया, वह रेत भी उस जार में जहाँ संभव था बैठ गई, अब छात्र अपनी नादानी पर हँसे ... फिर प्रोफेसर साहब ने पूछा, क्यों अब तो यह बरनी पूरी भर गई ना ?

हाँ। अब तो पूरी भर गई है। सभी ने एक स्वर में कहा..सर ने टेबल के नीचे से चाय के दो कप निकालकर उसमें की चाय जार में डाली, चाय भी रेत के बीच में स्थित थोड़ी सी जगह में सोख ली गई...प्रोफेसर साहब ने गंभीर आवाज में समझाना शुरू किया — इस काँच की बरनी को तुम लोग अपना जीवन समझो ...

टेबल टेनिस की गेंदें सबसे महत्वपूर्ण भाग अर्थात भगवान, परिवार, बच्चे, मित्र, स्वास्थ्य और शौक हैं, छोटे कंकर मतलब तुम्हारी नौकरी, कार, बड़ा मकान आदि हैं, और रेत का मतलब और भी छोटी-छोटी बेकार सी बातें, मनमुटाव, झगड़े हैं.. अब यदि तुमने काँच की बरनी में सबसे पहले रेत भरी होती तो टेबल टेनिस की गेंदों और कंकरों के लिये जगह ही नहीं बचती, या कंकर भर दिये होते तो गेंदें नहीं भर पाते, रेत जरूर आ सकती थी ... ठीक यही बात जीवन पर लागू होती है ... यदि तुम छोटी-छोटी बातों के पीछे पड़े रहोगे और अपनी ऊर्जा उसमें नष्ट करोगे तो तुम्हारे पास मुख्य बातों के लिये अधिक समय नहीं रहेगा... मन के सुख के लिये क्या जरूरी है ये तुम्हें तय करना है। अपने बच्चों के साथ खेलो, बगीचे में पानी डालो, सुबह पत्नी के साथ घूमने निकल जाओ, घर के बेकार सामान को बाहर निकाल फेंको, मेडिकल चेक-अप करवाओ..टेबल टेनिस गेंदों की फ़िक्र पहले करो, वही महत्वपूर्ण है ... पहले तय करो कि क्या जरूरी है ... बाकी सब तो रेत है.

छात्र बड़े ध्यान से सुन रहे थे। अचानक एक ने पूछा, सर लेकिन आपने यह नहीं बताया कि “चाय के दो कप” क्या हैं ? प्रोफेसर मुस्कराये, बोले ... मैं सोच ही रहा था कि अभी तक ये सवाल किसी ने क्यों नहीं किया ... इसका उत्तर यह है कि, जीवन हमें कितना ही परिपूर्ण और संतुष्ट लगे, लेकिन अपने खास मित्र के साथ दो कप चाय पीने की जगह हमेशा होनी चाहिये।

दोस्तों कितना सुंदर विचार है। पर चाह कर भी, अपने स्वाभाव के अनुरूप भी मैं ये नहीं कर सकता। पता नहीं क्यों दुनिया दोरंगी लगती है। जिससे भी मिलने जाता हूँ ... उस व्यक्ति का भावः हमेशा से कुछ स्संक्षित लगता है। जे राम जी ज्यादा नहीं दिल का गुबार निकला तो बात दूर तक जायेगी।



Synopsis

A short video that captures the warmth and diversity of conversations over a hot cup of chai. Almost everybody in India loves a refreshing cup of chai - the young, the middle aged, the old and the wise. The video is in three parts, touching on matters that are contemporary - professor, salaries, caste and equality; matters that have to do with the heart and matters that are philosophical and other-worldly. *



Why three parts?

I would like to think of them as more of three different flavours of life. There could be more or less, yes! But through my journey of understanding both the subject and the medium these stories are closely associated with the clarity I gained talking and meeting people. Their stories in some way or the other have become a part of the video. Hence Chai Conversation could not just be one story or one conversation.

Three also to stick to the short duration of about 15 - 20 minutes to briefly give a sense of what each part is talking about.



Short Video

The reason why from the beginning I have kept insisting on calling it a video is because it has been both a struggle as well a joy ride learning and just beginning to crack this medium and to call it a film comes with a lot of preconceived notions. A video could still be more organic and flexible and there was more room to give it any form.

Hence it is about 15 – 20 minutes long. As its my first attempt, it had to be enough to hold the attention of the audience but also not too long and dull. This much time is also enough to work on editing skills and essentially get a sense of the working of this medium.



Part 1

Salaries, Farmers and Equality

This part begins with the demolition of a temporary chai 'tapri' meant to serve chai to workers at a construction site for a convention centre. A conversation with Rajendra, the owner of the 'tapri' throws up unexpected wisdom. In a nation divided by caste; in a nation where incomes are disparate, the views of a humble chai maker are as refreshing as the chai that he makes.



Tone

Like mentioned earlier each part is meant to have a certain tone or flavour related to the subject it subtly covers. Although equality and caste, which is usually considered a serious concern, is being discussed on the whole it is about a connection that is shared with a person who opens up and talks about his life. About the way he makes a living in the big city-serving people.

Structure

The rough structure of thought to help visualize the part

-Tapri coming down. Being torn down by construction workers whom its been serving all this while.

-Shot of tapir when it existed serving people, Rajendra making Chai and talking to people

-Rajendra introduces himself

-His take on Equality

-His take on Farmers and Professors

-His take on reservation

-How the days of the Tapri are numbered

-Them shifting out and moving on

-Conversation with him in the new place

-Life goes on for him in the new place...



Part 2

Chemistry

When two people have a chemistry between them, conversation flows naturally as questions about life ahead get explored over several cups of chai.

In today's time when at every stepping stone of a young person's life they are constantly under the stress of whether or not they have made the right decision and lived up to the expectations of parents especially, one such decision is choosing a life partner. There are still many who follow the old school way of looking for the right person, hence this is a light hearted take on two such people who happen to meet each other as their parents set them up and how they get to know each other over a cup of Chai.



Tone

Like the previous this also in a way brings to light a concern of today's youth but in a more light hearted intimate way. It hopes to connect with the youth of today in a way that makes them smile and wonder who are they really looking for?

Structure

Structure

The rough structure of thought to help visualize the part

- Establishing where two people meet
- They introduce each other
- Conversation begins
- Tea being served
- what are they looking for?
- what they do?
- Thought on marriage
- Simultaneously drinking Chai
- Conversation goes on as they find out they may just get along quite well



Part 3

With or without milk / Emptiness

“A cup of tea” Zen Story

Although a Zen story the idea was to somehow implement it in today’s context. As the story goes a well-learned professor went to meet Nan – in a Japanese master of Zen to learn more about Zen. When the professor met the master, the master served tea and began to pour in his cup and let it overflow.

The professor watched the overflow until he no longer could restrain himself. “It is overfull. No more will go in!”

“Like this cup,” Nan-in said, “you are full of your own opinions and speculations. How can I show you Zen unless you first empty your cup?”

Love. Wealth. Justice. Nirvana. The four pillar of warmth and happiness.

The final part re-visits an ancient zen story

Although inspired by a zen story the last part is set very much in the modern urban setting. It explores the relationship between a father and daughter. It is a conversation between a father who is now old and has a grown up daughter with a child. They share their experiences about their generations and try to convince one another about the pros and cons of their own times. In the meanwhile it is a small boy (the daughters son) who through his world view makes them realize that one can only learn from passing time and also if one is willing to empty their cup and listen.



Tone

This particular part is a bit philosophical, quirky and zen like. Since it directly draws inspiration from a very common zen story it is pure and light. Like all zen stories that say so much in very few words this too leaves you with a thought that you can mull over. About life and emptiness, which is a virtue in itself.

Structure

- Establishing the home environment where the conversation is about to happen.
- Father and Daughter sit to drink tea after a long tiring day of work.
- Conversation smoothly moves from work pressure and times now. The crowd, traffic, people and behavior.
- They begin to argue about the generations difference in values and moving times.
- Meanwhile the little boy (daughters son) enters the scene and sits silently watching his grand dad and mother argue.
- Soon he becomes the centre of their conversation and the discussion moves to his generation and changing times.
- While he is silently observing he picks up the tea pot and begins to pour tea into tea cup letting it overflow.
- The cup overflows and the zen story appears as subtitles.



Title Sequence

OPTION A

Animated conversation between two kettles with an interesting conversation as the audio track.

OPTION B

Gestures of people drinking chai. Interesting conversation in the audio track.



Final Title Sequence

The title sequence which finally was set in place is a close up sequence of two cups of cutting chai and hands holding and drinking from it. The music sets the mood the of the conversation which can be experienced only through hand gestures and shot of the chai in the cups reducing with time. This seemed most apt to set the tone for the entire film.



“A film gets made three times”

It is said, once when you think of the concept or idea and write it, then when you actually shoot and get the act together and the third time once you begin to edit and bring it all together. A lot of changes occur and sometimes it no longer remains the same from start to finish. I am beginning to see what it really means, from where I started and the way its taking shape seems like quite a bit. So much changes because of constraints that either you impose on yourself or the ones that are not in control, hence to enjoy each stage is what is the learning is out of. It is quite easy to give up I have learnt not knowing what you have got yourself into, but I am hoping all the unsaid things I have learnt will stay with me for life once this project ends.



Tools

A number of technical aspects come in play while planning. For instance when deciding the duration of the video, for a fifteen minute video how much footage do you require?

It depends, the more footage you have it is a safe bet but more work to sift through each bit. Since I did a bit of testing and experimenting with few people I have footage of about 5 to 6 hours and more.

Final Cut pro is the software used to edit the video, and after effects at a later stage to add treatment.

Garage Band for sound editing

Sony 3ccd camera to shoot and my personal Sony handy cam. Although the quality of the 3ccd is much more superior. Handy cam is good for documentation and research as people don't notice in public and get conscience Pen and paper to constantly keep track of my thoughts.



Epilogue

On one of many occasions when I have discussed Chai Conversation with Raja Mohanty, my guide. I remember him once telling me about Arundhati Roy and the first film she made during her college days. The film “ When Annie gave it to those guys” even today is a reflection of her state of mind then and now. After so many years when you see the film some how one sees where she has come from and there is a continuity of thought in what she works for and is doing today. I was told that my project should have what is me and even after a couple of years when I or anyone else sees it in a way it should reflect the same.

I am hoping for the same, the essence of what is the outcome of Chai Conversation is carried forward for the times to come and I am reminded of my journey and people who have helped me realize the value of being true to nobody but yourself.





Reference

Books

Reisz Karel, Millar Gavin, 'The Technique of Film Editing', Focal, London and Boston, 1983.

The way of Tea, Pages 177- 189,
Yanagi Soetsu, 'Unknown Craftsman,
Japanese Insight into Beauty', Tokyo,
Kodansha International, 1972

Web

<http://www.jkrishnamurti.org/>
(Second Public Question & Answer Meeting in
Madras, December 1981)

www.wikipedia.com
www.google.com/images
www.corbis.com

http://books.google.com/books?id=TBwUIXucXzQC&pg=PA169&lpg=PA169&dq=gandhi+on+equality&source=bl&ots=qLzBbvWQP8&sig=IRB5su7aWc6BLZS1WPmuyplicb8&hl=en&ei=yXb7Ss6sHljk6gPE_NmWAg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=6&ved=0CB4Q6AEwBQ#v=onepage&q=gandhi%20on%20equality&f=false
(Inequality: radical institutionalist views on race,
gender, class, and nation
By William M. Dugger)

www.chaitime.com
<http://pegasus.cc.ucf.edu/~stanlick/equality1.html>

Films

Amelie
River and Tides
Ganges
When Annie gave it back to them
Coffee and Cigarettes
Before Sunrise
Before Sunset
FTII short films
Cinema Paradiso
Malena
Dharm
Angoor
Golmaal
Ikiru

* Raja Mohanty

