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## How tea changed contemporary Indian politics

Chai pe charcha | Today is International Tea Day. Against its backdrop, dna assesses the importance of tea and its impact on Indian lives


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### Relax, have a nice cup in city's first tea room

Styled in a Victorian ambience with high ceilings and giving the vibe of a government quarter, 'Tea Centre' at Resham Bhawan near Churchgate station has been standing for more than 57 years. With more than 100 varieties of teas, the tea centre has come a long way. **•p6**

### That indispensable cup...

I know my chai. I have a relationship with it: I need to have it first thing in the morning, every morning and then a cup again in the evening. So, I have sampled chai — in fine china/plastic cups/glasses, of varying shapes and sizes/even in a katorie — across the country. **•p6**

 [Enlarge Image](#)

New Delhi: With an ill-advised political barb from Congress leader Mani Shankar Aiyar mocking BJP's prime ministerial candidate Narendra Modi as a chaiwallah (tea boy), the unofficial national drink of India, tea, took centrestage in the national elections and finally helped Modi to conquer South Block, the seat of power with an overwhelming majority.

Against the backdrop of International Tea Day, here is a look at how linking Modi to chai finally helped him win the elections. Since 2005, December 15 is celebrated as International Tea Day in tea producing countries including India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal. The Day is observed to draw global attention of governments and citizens to the impact of the global tea trade on workers, small growers and consumers.

Some 240 years after the Americans used the Boston Tea Party to launch the War of Independence, Modi and his backroom boys effectively turned tables to use tea as political tool to launch Congress Mukht Bharat campaign.

Deep in the remote corners of Bihar's Dharbhanga district in Barambora village, a tea vendor Satosh Yadav had never voted for the BJP. Till elections he had not even heard of Modi, even though he was chief minister of Gujarat for over 10 years. But like many others he was glued to a TV where Modi had begun Chai pe Charcha. The first event was broadcast to tea stands across 300 cities. A rickshaw driver and farmer, waiting for a cup of tea said, "They feel only the rich and educated become prime ministers. At least Modi knows how to make tea. Has any other leader ever made anything himself," he questioned.

Possibility of someone rising through the ranks and becoming a PM had caught imagination of working class. "I have never voted for the BJP. But this election was to save honour of a humble tea vendor," the vendor told this writer on during the election trail.

Despite former chairman of Planning Commission MS Ahluwalia failing to declare tea national drink in 2012 (apparently the coffee manufacturers objected), today it is changing politics in the country.

Linking Modi's success to tea politics, social scientist Prof Dharmindra Kumar Singh says, "Earlier, people liked to see rulers as someone descending from heaven and possessing magical powers to save them from everything wrong.

But now six decades after the Independence, people want someone with whom they can identify with and

who is at their service round-the-clock to rule them,” he said. The Congress is yet to understand this while Modi used this very well to his benefit by connecting with the people far and wide.

On January 17, on the sidelines of the AICC session, Aiyar had said, “There is no way he (Modi) can be prime minister in the 21st century... But if he wants to come and serve tea here we can make some room for him.”

Modi retorted. “They do not like it if a chaiwallah, a son of a poor mother walks with his head held high...The Congress has insulted the poor, mocked my origins as a tea seller.”

In a country where up to 90% of the working population have jobs in the informal sector - like tea stalls - Modi and his team, sold his personal story well. In Uttar Pradesh alone where they won 71 of the total 81 seats, the BJP reached to tea stalls in 80,000 villages, spreading the message, ‘Achhe din aanewale hain, Narendra Modi aanewale hain’ (Good times are here to come, Narendra Modi is coming)’.

Congress leader Aiyar now says he had never used the word ‘chaiwallah for Modi. “Modi had himself told the world about his background,” he said. However, it can not be denied that the seemingly innocuous political comment changed the political course of the country forever.

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