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Tea time as a practice: Adoption, Adaptation and Negotiations in Everyday Life

Dissertation submitted by

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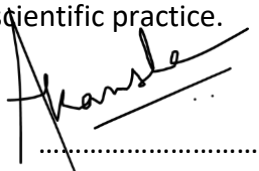
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Declaration

I declare that I have completed this dissertation independently and without unauthorised outside help and only with the help that I have indicated in the dissertation. All text passages are literally or analogously from published works, and all information based on verbal information are labelled as such. In the research conducted by me and mentioned in the dissertation, I have complied with the principles of good scientific practice as laid down in the "Statutes of the Justus Liebig University Giessen" to ensure good scientific practice.



7 April 2026 ……

Date Akansha Mishra

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Zusammenfassung

Studien zum Konsumverhalten haben sich überwiegend auf rationales Entscheiden konzentriert, um zu erklären, warum Menschen essen, was sie essen. Gleichzeitig haben Forschende jedoch auf die Automatisierung alltäglicher Aktivitäten hingewiesen und darauf, in welchem Ausmaß diese in einem habitualisierten, als selbstverständlich genommenen Modus ablaufen, um kognitive Belastung zu reduzieren. In Indien wird Tee täglich konsumiert und ist historisch im Zusammenhang mit seiner Einführung und Verbreitung untersucht worden; die Teepause als alltägliche, mit Routinen verflochtene Aktivität ist jedoch nur selten als Moment des Konsums analysiert worden.

Diese Dissertation untersucht die Teepause als Praxis und analysiert ihre Elemente, um herauszuarbeiten, wie sie routinisiert wird, welche impliziten Regeln sie organisieren und wie sie sich in Anwesenheit anderer unterschiedlich ausgestaltet. Die Etablierung der Teepause als Praxis bedeutet, dass sie durch gemeinsam geteilte Regeln und Normen darüber stabilisiert wird, wie sie ausgeführt wird und ausgeführt werden soll. Auf Grundlage der Praxistheorie wurde die Teepause daher analysiert, um ihre konstitutiven Elemente – geteilte Verständnisse, Verfahren und Engagements – anhand der Erzählungen der Teilnehmenden zu untersuchen. Das qualitative Forschungsdesign ermöglichte eine Auseinandersetzung mit dem Sagen und Tun der Teilnehmenden und situierte die Teepause als routinierte Praxis, die in die zeitlichen Rhythmen des Alltags eingebettet ist. Sie folgt dem Tagesrhythmus und nimmt zu unterschiedlichen Tageszeiten unterschiedliche Bedeutungen an. Die Teepause wurde innerhalb der Familie durch Beobachtung als Praxis weitergegeben und überwiegend durch Wiederholung angeeignet, wobei Praktizierende schrittweise in die Praxis rekrutiert wurden.

Gleichzeitig zeigte sich die Teepause als soziale Praxis, die je nach sozialem Kontext angepasst oder verändert wird. Die Anwesenheit anderer verschob die Elemente der Praxis und erlaubte Formveränderungen, während sie dennoch erkennbar und stabil blieb. Die Analyse dieser Verschiebungen verdeutlichte die Rolle sozialer Interaktion für die Aufrechterhaltung der Teepause als Praxis. In Haushalten koordinierten die Praktizierenden ihre Praxis miteinander, um familiäre Harmonie und Bindungen zu sichern. In Arbeitskontexten wurde die Teepause in ähnlicher Weise koordiniert, um sich an

organisationale Rhythmen anzupassen. In Anwesenheit von Gästen wurde die Teepause zu einem Ort der Gastfreundschaft, bei dem der Tee das Medium darstellte, während die Beilagen eine zentrale Rolle bei der Vermittlung von Geselligkeit und Fürsorge einnahmen. Obwohl sich die konkrete Ausgestaltung der Teepause veränderte, blieb ihre Identität selbst in Anwesenheit von Gästen erhalten. Dies zeigt, dass die Teepause als soziale Praxis fungiert und einen minimalen Akt der Gastfreundschaft konstituiert.

Schließlich veranschaulicht die Studie, wie gesundheitliche Anliegen in den Alltag integriert werden. Die Praktizierenden waren sich potenzieller gesundheitlicher Risiken bewusst und ergriffen präventive Maßnahmen, gaben die Praxis jedoch weder bei auftretenden noch bei antizipierten Gesundheitsbedenken auf. Stattdessen passten sie die materiellen Elemente der Praxis an, um gesundheitlichen Anforderungen Rechnung zu tragen und so ihre Beziehung zur Teepause aufrechtzuerhalten. Solange die Bedeutung der Teepause nicht durch Ekel gegenüber dem Geschmack ersetzt wurde oder ihr symbolischer Wert nicht kollabierte, wurde die Praxis flexibel modifiziert und nicht aufgegeben.

Diese Studie leistet einen Beitrag zu den Food Studies in Indien, indem sie empirisch zeigt, dass alltägliche Esspraktiken durch Routinisierung, Koordination und Anpassung aufrechterhalten werden – und nicht primär durch bewusste Entscheidungsfindung oder Verhaltensänderung. Durch die Analyse der Teepause als Praxis im Rahmen der Praxistheorie wird deutlich, wie alltägliches Essen auch bei veränderten Kontexten oder gesundheitlichen Anliegen durch die Rekonfiguration seiner Elemente fortbesteht. Praktizierende sind in der Lage, die Praxis auf ihre Weise anzupassen, um Kontinuität und Wiedererkennbarkeit zu bewahren, anstatt sie aufzugeben. Ohne verhaltensorientierte Ansätze, die auf rationaler Entscheidungsfindung beruhen, grundsätzlich infrage zu stellen, zeigt die Studie, dass solche Rahmenwerke unzureichend sind, um routinisierte Esspraktiken zu verstehen und zu beeinflussen. Sie unterstreicht die Bedeutung der Berücksichtigung von Automatisierung bei der Gestaltung von Politiken oder Interventionen. Interventionen, die sich ausschließlich auf Informationsvermittlung oder individuelle Wahlmöglichkeiten stützen, sind daher kaum geeignet, tief verankerte Praktiken zu verändern. Stattdessen erfordert nachhaltiger Wandel eine Auseinandersetzung mit der Organisation der Praktiken selbst, einschließlich ihrer Einbettung in zeitliche, soziale und materielle Arrangements.

Summary

Consumption behaviour studies have largely focused on rational decision-making to guide and explain why people eat the way they do; however, scholars have also highlighted the automaticity of our everyday activities and the extent to which they operate in a habituated, taken-for-granted mode to reduce cognitive load. In India, tea is consumed every day and has been studied historically in relation to its arrival and spread; however, tea time, as an everyday activity entwined with the routine, has rarely been examined as a moment of consumption.

This dissertation investigates tea time as a practice and examines its elements to highlight how it becomes routinised, what tacit rules organise it and how it takes different shapes in the presence of others. The establishment of tea time as a practice meant that tea time is stabilised through commonly shared rules and norms about how it is and should be performed. Therefore, using the practice theoretical approach, tea time was analysed to examine its constituent elements - the shared *understandings, procedures and engagements*- using participants' narratives. The qualitative design of this research helped engage with the participants' sayings and doings, situating tea time as a routine practice embedded in the temporal rhythms of everyday life. It aligned with the tempo of the day, meaning different things at different times of the day. Tea time was inherited as a practice through observation within the family and was largely adopted through repetition, with practitioners gradually recruited into the practice.

Similarly, tea time emerged as a social practice that was adjusted or adapted based on the social context. The presence of others shifted the elements of the practice, allowing it to change form while still remaining recognisable and stable. The analysis of these shifts highlighted the role of social interaction in sustaining tea time as a practice. In household settings, practitioners coordinated their practice with each other to maintain familial harmony and bonds. In workplace settings, tea time was similarly coordinated to align with organisational rhythms. In the presence of guests, tea time became a site of hospitality where the tea was the medium, but the accompaniments took a central role in conveying conviviality and care. While the shape of tea time varied, its identity remained intact even in the presence of guests, demonstrating that tea time functions as a social practice and constitutes as a minimum act of hospitality.

Finally, the study illustrated how health concerns are absorbed into the everyday. Practitioners were aware of potential health concerns and took preventative steps, but they did not quit the practice when health concerns arose or were anticipated. Instead, they adjusted the material elements of the practice to accommodate the health concerns, thereby sustaining their relationship with tea time. Unless the meaning of tea time was replaced by disgust for the taste or it symbolic value collapsed, the practice was flexibly modified rather than abandoned.

This study contributes to food studies in India by empirically demonstrating how everyday eating practices are sustained through routinisation, coordination, and adjustment rather than deliberate decision-making or behavioural change. By analysing tea time as a practice using a practice-theoretical approach, the study demonstrates how mundane eating persists through the reconfiguration of its elements even in changes in settings or health concerns. Practitioners are able to adapt the practice in their ways to preserve the continuity and recognisably rather than abandoning it. While this study does not seek to undermine the behavioural approaches grounded in rational decision making, it does highlight that such frameworks are insufficient for understanding and intervening in routinised eating practices. It highlights the importance of accounting for automaticity when designing policies or interventions; therefore, interventions relying solely on information provision or individual choice are unlikely to disrupt entrenched practices. Instead, meaningful change requires engaging with the organisation of practices themselves, including their embeddedness in the temporal, social, and material arrangements.

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Introduction

(With embedded Literature Review)

Chapter 1. Introduction (with embedded Literature Review)

1.1 Setting the scene

Eating is a fundamental biological need for survival, often performed automatically in response to bodily cues. The act of eating, while serving the biological function, also reflects the social, cultural, and economic practices that have shaped it (Counihan, 2008; Delormier et al., 2009; Lupton, 1996). The foods we choose to eat or avoid can signal our origins, values, experiences, and aspirations (Fischler, 1988; Warde, 2005). What we eat, when we eat and how we eat can reflect social class, identity, emotional state, moral orientation, and even political/religious affiliations (Mintz & Bois, 2002). In this way, eating is a site of meaning-making, one that can reveal the interplay between the self and society.

While eating is a site for meaning-making, much of our everyday eating is registered as automatic and mundane, reflecting habituated patterns of action (Warde, 2016). This mundane obviousness and automaticity are what make these actions invisible to everyday reflections (Southerton, 2013). However, a deliberate examination of everyday eating can provide insights into the meanings, tensions and values that are embedded in daily lives, revealing eating as a routine that is socially situated and negotiated (Halkier, 2022).

In India, tea or '*chai*'[1] drinking is a routinely performed everyday activity. It occupies a distinctive place in everyday Indian life as the most widely consumed sweetened beverage, frequently operating as a moment around which snacking is organised (Roy et al., 2021). This act of drinking tea with something to nibble on is a deeply cultural practice. It emerged under the colonial regime and is now embedded in the everyday, punctuating daily life by offering energy, comfort, a moment of pause and opportunities for social bonding (Lutgendorf, 2012).

Studies on eating and food in India have largely been shaped by anthropological and cultural studies, which have generated rich insights into the role of religion, morality, identity, and social distinction (Appadurai, 1988; Khare, 1980, 1992). These works have situated religious norms, caste-based distinctions, and broader cultural logics, helping to conceptualise the

[1] Chai is tea in Hindi. Hereafter, tea and chai will be used interchangeably since they mean the same.

organisation of what is eaten and by whom. These studies elevated the scholarly engagement with Indian food through the lens of religious rituals, regional cuisines, festivities, and social hierarchies (Achaya, 1998; Ray & Srinivas, 2012; Seal, 2023).

However, attending to the mundane everyday activity, such as tea time, as a site of analysis can help understand how these norms are lived and enacted. It can offer an insight into how everyday eating is organised, experienced, and sustained in daily life.

1.2 Food and Eating in India

Indian food culture is shaped by diverse and complex culinary traditions, developed over thousands of years through historical processes, the influence of different religious and philosophical systems, the diversity of geographical regions, and continuous cultural exchange. The current eating practices have evolved through continuous adaptation and reproductions that can be traced to several Imperial movements, including influences from the Portuguese, Mughals, Persians and British (Asharaf & Vatakkayil, 2025; Zubaida, 2009). While India does not identify with a singular national dish, the methods, ingredients, and ways of thinking about food create recognisable patterns of Indian foodways (Sen, 2004).

1.2.1 Food Culture in India

Food has been the key marker of differentiation in India. Beyond socioeconomic constraints, it is deeply reflective of community identities, religious affiliations, health philosophies, social hierarchies, and cultural continuities (Sen, 2015; Sen et al., 2023). According to a review in the Journal of Ethnic Foods, food in India is closely linked to notions of health and holistic living, with traditional knowledge and religious practices significantly shaping what foods are prepared and consumed, especially during religious festivals and offerings to deities.

Traditionally, the commensality rules were reinforced by religious and class boundaries and dictated food purity, who could eat with whom, who could prepare food for whom, and the subsequent social boundaries and relationships (Prakash, 2020). However, in the last few decades, eating practices have changed drastically, creating new foodways. While these shifts have been mostly visible in the urban settings, the rural contexts have not remained untouched.

1.2.2 Urban Food Environments

In urban India, food practices are informed not only by tradition and health but also by shifting class positions, market forces, and globalised aspirations. The economic liberalisation in the late 90s, coupled with rapid infrastructure development and globalisation, led to a rapid transformation in consumption habits and food environments in India (Law et al., 2020; Meenakshi, 2016; Popkin, 2015). Since globalisation has modified traditional foodways, it has also created opportunities to innovate and evolve food cultures.

Supermarkets, fast food outlets, and delivery services have become central to urban life, particularly for the middle class. This demographic, characterised by rising income and time scarcity, has been susceptible to shifts, often relying on marketing cues and convenience-oriented choices (Hawkes, 2006; Pingali & Sunder, 2017).

While the 'nutrition transition'[2] framework has been beneficial in influencing global health discourse, many critics argued that it often overlooks the socio-cultural specificities and the role of consumers in shaping the new food practices in particular contexts. Therefore, it is important to extend the lens to analyse the changing eating habits in a specific socio-cultural background (Blue et al., 2021; Landy, 2009; Shove, 2003).

1.2.3 Middle Class Aspirations and Tea Time

Since the middle class is not a uniform social group, but a dynamic group that can differ based on the context (Dickey, 2012). It has been the subject of fascination for many scholars for its ambiguous definition and fluidity of social, moral, cultural and economic boundaries (van Wessel, 2004). Broadly, this group is characterised by those who are neither economically vulnerable nor excessively wealthy, navigating their lives through calculated consumption, cautious spending and an acute awareness of social status (Banerjee & Duflo, 2007; Elfick, 2011).

Historically, middle-class consumption patterns have shaped broader market trends, as this group represents a major profit-generating segment for businesses (Chaudhary & Khatoon,

[2] Barry Popkin's (2015) concept of nutrition transition describes the shift from traditional diets (cereal/fibre-rich) to "Western" diets high in fat, sugar, processed foods, and meat, driven by economic growth, urbanisation, and globalisation.

2021). Numerous practices and commodities such as smoking, drinking and dining out, once confined to elite and niche groups, became widespread and globally significant only through adoption by the middle class (Bourdieu, 1984; Warde, 1997). As a result, the middle class has emerged not only as a key consumer group but also as an influential social group whose everyday practices shape commercial strategies and cultural trends.

In sociological studies, middle-class identities are socially constructed through everyday participation and symbolic expressions, including taste and consumption choices (Bhattacharya, 2024; Brosius, 2012; Dickey, 2012; Rangwala et al., 2020).

Since the Indian middle class today has much more disposable income than their previous generations, they are one of the largest and most influential consumer groups in the world (*How India Will Consume in 2030*, 2019). It is the most viable demographic to engage with inventions and technologies, acting as a central force in defining the political and sociocultural discourse (Kumar et al., 2022).

The proliferation of urban infrastructures such as shopping malls, supermarkets, digital shopping platforms, and online delivery is paving the way for convenience-driven consumption, especially in the urban regions of India. These transformations reflect the pursuit of comfort, cosmopolitanism and mobility in the middle classes. (Chaudhary & Khatoon, 2021; Fernandes & Heller, 2006).

In urban India, there is virtually no product or service that cannot be delivered to the doorstep, a transformation that has profoundly reshaped urban food environments. The convenience and abundance of store-bought, ready-to-eat food options are both a consequence and a catalyst for the middle-class consumption practice. As a result, the middle class emerges not only as a key consumer market segment but as a cultural force that is actively redefining what, how, and when people eat. As such, the preferences and practices of this class wield significant influence over broader patterns of food consumption and, by extension, public health outcomes (Brosius, 2012; Chaudhary & Khatoon, 2021; Patgiri, 2022).

Given the scale and influence of the middle class, tea time emerges as a critical site for examining how norms and everyday order are negotiated through food, with implications that extend beyond public health policy concerns.

1.3 The Historical and Cultural Framing of Tea Time

Tea drinking, much like tea cultivation, has colonial roots. The practice was introduced to Indians only after the arrival of the East India Company in the 18th century. While tea drinking was adopted by the British upper class from the Dutch and Portuguese in the 17th century, its rise as a mass cultural habit in Britain coincided with the increase of cheap trade with China and the availability of cheap sugar. In a bid to end the monopoly of Chinese traders, the East India Company attempted to plant tea in the foothills of the Himalayan mountains. The cultivation began in 1823 after the discovery and success of an indigenous variety found in the North-East Region of India – Assam.

Initially, the tea was cultivated solely for export to the Western markets. It was neither accessible nor popular among the Indian population. The earliest domestic consumption was limited to the elite class, known as 'Bhadra Lok', who were the anglophiles who worked closely with the colonial administration.

To expand profits and business, the British decided to stimulate domestic demand and undertook extensive marketing campaigns to popularise tea as a modern, civilised beverage in the Indian markets. The campaigns included narratives promoting tea as a lifestyle, as the national symbol of unity, an instrument of women's awakening and even a beverage to make Indians "alert like the British". The campaign also involved selling small packets of tea as free samples in 'tea vans', which would dispense free tea and teach people the art of tea-making.

In 1947, after gaining Independence from British rule, tea plantations were taken over by the Ministry of Commerce, and tea was advertised as a '*swadeshi*' (indigenous/local in Hindi) commodity. By the latter half of the 20th century, both tea and the process of tea making had been thoroughly vernacularised. While filter coffee does hold supremacy in Southern India, chai has permeated its way into public and private life across India. *Chai* is the most ubiquitously consumed beverage in India (Lutgendorf, 2012). The tea preparation evolved into the now Indian-style tea, which is made in one pot by brewing black tea with boiling milk, water, and sugar. Tea is also blended with spices such as fresh cardamom, ginger, or black pepper, depending on the season, occasion, or personal preference.

The institutionalisation of tea culture began in India with the establishment of 'Tea Cabins' in Bengal. These simple establishments serving tea with a limited assortment of snacks were the centre of regular meetups and social spaces for urban men. While 'Tea cabins' aren't as prevalent, tea drinking has become deeply embedded in everyday Indian life. By the mid-20th century, Indians who were once unfamiliar with the taste of tea had adopted it as an essential part of their daily lives, a transformation driven by widespread marketing through advertisements, postcards, railway kettles, etc. (Lutgendorf, 2012). Today, an estimated three-quarters of the tea produced in India is consumed domestically (Chatterjee, 2022). Many urban Indians start the day with masala chai and go on to drink several cups at roadside stalls or offices.

Informal roadside chai stalls (*tapris*) have become ubiquitous community spaces where people from all walks of life pause to chat over a cup. While Chatterjee (2022) highlights how tea became part of English life through marketing and cultural mythmaking, a process he calls "gastromythology" (Chatterjee, 2022), teatime is also a socially and culturally structured ensemble of practices in India. The moment of tea is constituted through material objects (cups, kettles, snacks), bodily routines (boiling, pouring, sipping), and socio-symbolic meanings (hospitality, pause, comfort). Understanding this practice is crucial for making sense of how teatime operates as a meaningful site of everyday practice in urban Indian households today.

1.4 Public Health Situation in India

Snacking has become a ubiquitous feature of the changing contemporary urban diets. A study in Pune[3] found high levels of snack consumption across all age groups, genders, and income brackets (Roy et al., 2021). While hunger was cited as the most common reason for snacking, the study also highlighted the importance of peer interactions and social contexts in shaping snack choices. Tea drinking, in particular, emerged as a central component of these snacking patterns: 75% of adults in the Pune sample reported daily tea consumption. Shifts in diets and lifestyles have begun to transform domestic routines and eating rhythms in India (Hawkes et al., 2015; Popkin, 2015). Public health research has established growing concern about

[3] The second-largest metropolitan city in the state of Maharashtra, India.

shifting dietary patterns characterised by high intakes of fats, sugars, and salt, linking these trends to an increasing burden of diet-related non-communicable diseases (Dandona et al., 2017; Mohanty et al., 2020; Nguyen et al., 2021).

The 'nutrition transition' has coincided with a marked increase in the incidence of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs), prompting growing concerns in public health scholarship in India. Existing research has developed the link between the consumption of ultra-processed foods, often high in salt, sugar and unhealthy fats, and several associated factors with this shift (Baker & Friel, 2014). The current projection suggests that the prevalence of overweight is likely to double among Indian adults aged 20-69 years between 2010 to 2040 (Luhar et al., 2020). Correspondingly, data from the Indian Council of Medical Research indicate that the share of disease burden due to NCDs rose from 37.9% in 1990 to 61.8% in 2016, with ischaemic heart disease, diabetes, COPD, and strokes being the primary contributors to premature mortality (Dandona et al., 2017; Vos et al., 2020).

However, these trends cannot be understood through changes in dietary trends. The rising burden of NCDs is also embedded in the broader socio-cultural transformation that has brought changes in the way people engage with food. Moreover, India's capacity to respond to this health burden is uneven, shaped by disparities in healthcare access and social support services (Schmidhuber & Shetty, 2005).

1.5 Rationale for the study

In contemporary public health discourse, eating and health have been analysed through rational decision-making where being (or seeming) unhealthy is often framed as an individual's disregard for health, poor food choices, and a failure of personal responsibility. These framings, being the key focus in shaping behavioural interventions to improve health and nutrition, heavily rely on the idea of personal responsibility and accountability while sometimes overlooking the wider social and cultural factors that shape choices.

Sociological and practice-oriented research have sought to address this limitation by emphasising the role of socio-cultural norms, routines, and everyday contexts in shaping eating practices. The current studies on eating practices and everyday life have been gaining scholarly attention within the European context (Cheng et al., 2007; Halkier, 2017; Holm et

al., 2015; Warde et al., 2023; Warde & Yates, 2017; Wills et al., 2011); however, there is a lack of evidence from different cultural and social contexts.

In India, tea is a ubiquitous sweetened beverage and is part of the fabric of life. While perceived as quintessentially Indian, tea drinking is neither a native nor an ancient tradition. Introduced by the British as part of colonial economic interests, tea has been so deeply absorbed into Indian social life that today, it is difficult to imagine an occasion, formal or informal, without a cup of *chai*. Yet, despite its omnipresence, tea time as a cultural and dietary moment remains underexamined in both academic literature and policy discussions related to food, health, and public well-being.

Therefore, using the concepts of practice theoretical approach (Shove et al., 2012; Warde, 2016), to conceptualise tea time as a social practice allowing the examination of how it is routinely performed, sustained and adapted in everyday life.

This research was shaped in response to the limited studies on everyday eating practices in India and by the desire to move beyond individualised accounts of dietary behaviour to examine the everyday automatic practices through which people engage with food. In place of treating individuals as rational consumers who simply require better information to make healthier choices, this study draws on a theoretical perspective that highlights the food decisions made through context, routine, and sociality that shape eating.

1.4 Indian Foodscape and role of *Chai*

In India, consumption habits vary significantly across regions and social contexts (Brosius, 2012). The environments in which food is consumed also play a vital role in shaping not only what is eaten but also how eating itself is performed (Certeau, 1998). The scholarly examination of Indian eating practices has been complicated, beginning with the complexity and diversity that exists within Indian cuisine. The variation in preparation techniques, ingredients, flavour profiles, and meal structure renders the examination as a whole difficult (Narayan, 1995; Ray & Srinivas, 2012).

However, despite this culinary heterogeneity, tea remains the most commonly consumed beverage across regional, linguistic, and class boundaries, weaving India's fragmented gastronomical landscape together (Lutgendorf, 2012).

1.4.1 Why tea time?

Tea time, or '*chai*' time, is a culturally and socially recognised consumption activity in India. Tea is a staple sweet beverage often accompanied by light snacks such as biscuits or savoury snacks, and often structures eating between formal meals, most commonly in the morning and evening (Bhadra, 2005). It is not only prepared at home but is also available readily in public places, prepared by brewing milk, water, sugar and tea leaves together in a pot till it is golden brown (Lutgendorf, 2012).

As a routinely enacted moment, particularly involving the consumption of food items high in salt, sugar, and fat, tea time offers a valuable empirical site for examining how everyday consumption choices are organised, normalised, and sustained in daily life. Embedded in the daily rhythms of urban Indian households, situated between meals, its examination can reflect the norms that are part of everyday eating.

1.4.2 Where to study the tea time?

This study analyses the tea time among the urban middle-class households. Urban middle-class consumers are the primary targets of the food and lifestyle industries, playing a central role in shaping, reproducing, and defining modern consumption practices (Brosius, 2012; Fernandes, 2006). Middle-class households in India typically have the economic means to focus on items that are not just sustenance. They value convenience and indulgence while being actively involved in reconstituting the norms of consumption (Donner, 2011). In urban India, regular use of food delivery apps, 10-minute grocery deliveries, eating out and fine dining (Mathur, 2010) signal the changing food environments and consumption patterns. This makes urban middle-class consumers the appropriate sample for examining the organisation, performance, and adaptation of the tea time.

Therefore, using the accounts of urban middle-class consumers provides a practical, analytical access to study the everyday tea time; however, this study is not concerned with the class-

based variables in everyday eating. Therefore, analysing how this group engages with and reproduces tea time is utilised to provide an insight into evolving Indian foodscapes and everyday eating.

1.5 Research Aims and Questions

This research is informed by scholarly engagement with literature on consumption, behaviour change and public health nutrition. These studies focused on understanding "unhealthy" eating habits; it sometimes overlooks the social, emotional, and practical meanings through which eating is embedded in everyday life. As a result, eating risks are reduced to normative judgments about health, rather than understood as a complex, socially organised practice.

This study adopts a practice-theoretical framework to overcome these limitations and to examine eating as a practice. It focuses on why particular eating practices persist, how they are routinely performed, and what meanings they hold within everyday life. This study looks closely at tea time in urban, middle-class households in India, focusing on how these everyday routines unfold within domestic settings. The aim is not to generalise or quantify dietary behaviour, but to closely examine ordinary, in-between eating moments to understand what they reveal about broader patterns of everyday eating, social interaction, and health negotiation.

The overarching aim of this study is:

Investigate the tea time as a social practice and to understand how it organises everyday eating through social norms, expectations, and embodied regulations.

Based on the aim, the study is guided by the following research questions:

1. ***How is tea time organised, sustained and made meaningful in everyday life?***

   This question draws attention to how participants explain, justify, or reflect on their tea time habits. It maps the routine elements and variations that give tea time its recognisable yet flexible character.

2. ***How do social interactions shape the performance of tea time as a social practice?***

This question explores the textures of tea time: what is eaten, how, when, with whom, and in what contexts. Here, the analytical framework is employed to examine the understandings, procedures and engagements that shift when tea time takes place in front of others.

3. ***How does tea time accommodate health concerns while remaining routinised, and how are these framed?***

   This question draws attention to how participants explain, justify, or reflect on their tea time habits. It captures embodied health norms that are reflected in everyday eating.

1.6 Scope and Significance of the Study

The scope of the study is purposely delimited to focus specifically on tea time enacted in everyday settings to highlight the depth and complexity of routine food practices. The study does not aim to achieve generalisability but to develop rich, situated meanings of food practices and generate a nuanced understanding of everyday consumption patterns beyond main meals. This thesis makes three key contributions.

1. Contribute to food studies and sociological inquiry by applying practice theory in the Indian context, where such approaches are still relatively underused.

2. Challenge the overemphasis on isolated individual behaviour, emphasising eating situated in habits, social roles, and negotiations that happen in the flow of everyday life.

3. Highlight how routines like tea time are not just about hunger or taste, but about hospitality, identity, and comfort. And if policies aimed at reducing processed food consumption ignore these meanings, they must understand how those eating practices are embedded in life.

1.7 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is organised into six chapters, each building on the previous to offer a cumulative and layered understanding of tea time as a practice in urban India. While the chapters are

thematically distinct, they are conceptually interlinked through the theoretical and methodological commitments of the study.

- Chapter 1: Introduction

  The current chapter has set the stage by outlining the background, rationale, research questions, public health, and cultural meanings of food in South Asia. It positions tea time as a critical yet understudied practice and introduces the broader sociological and policy relevance of the research.

- Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

  This chapter reviews the theoretical orientation of the study, highlighting the existing research on food practices and the sociology of eating. It situates the research within interdisciplinary debates, particularly those concerning practice theory.

- Chapter 3: Methodology

  This chapter details the research design, including sampling strategy, data collection methods (primarily semi-structured interviews), and analytical approach. It also offers a reflexive account of the researcher's positionality and ethical considerations encountered in the field.

- Chapter 4: Analysis and Findings

  This chapter details the findings and discussions in separate subsections handling different research questions

  - Chapter 4.1: Tea Time as Practice

    This chapter presents the first set of findings, focusing on what tea time consists of and how it is organised. It analyses the timings, routines and procedures that underpin its performance.

  - Chapter 4.2: Social Interactions and Meaning Making

    This chapter explores how participants use tea time for social interactions and how they perform these practices in social settings. It also attends to moments of change, adaptation, or resistance in participants' routines.

- Chapter 4.3: Health and Embodied Know How

  This chapter explores how participants make sense of their tea time and how their enactments intersect with broader concerns around health.

- Chapter 5: Discussion

  The final chapter synthesises the key arguments of the thesis and reflects on their theoretical, practical, and policy implications. It outlines how a practice-theoretical approach can contribute to more nuanced understandings of food, health, and everyday life, and suggests possible directions for future research.

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Theoretical Framework

Chapter 2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

This chapter situates the current study within the research on food and eating, everyday consumption, and the socio-cultural organisation of eating. The literature reviewed will highlight key sociological work that has evaluated the mundane, tacit, and embodied practices of food and eating, shifting attention to the routinised habits, embodied knowledge, normative expectations, and socio-cultural arrangements that have been relatively understudied in India.

2.2 Conceptual Definition and Theoretical Framing

In contemporary social science research, eating is not just a result of individual rational decision, but it operates as a routinised, socially embedded activity (Spaargaren, Weenink, et al., 2016). It is not detached from market forces or individual rationality, but it does occasionally occur through the repeated performance of socially accepted norms around eating. Therefore, to examine the social norms and relations that shape everyday eating, a practice-theoretical framework provides a middle ground between examining either market structures or individual rationality (Wertheim-Heck et al., 2014). The practice-theoretical framework analyses eating as a social practice that is routinely performed and stabilised by interaction between three elements, such as materials to perform the eating, competencies to cook, eat and shop and meanings including embodied needs, wants or social significance of eating (Blue et al., 2016; Warde, 2005).

This study uses Schatzki's (1996) definition of social practice, who defines it as *'spatially and temporally dispersed nexus of sayings and doings'*, which derive their meanings through performance and relation to other practices.

Since tea time is a regularly occurring activity, in this study, tea time is conceptualised as a social practice that involves the consumption of tea and some accompaniment[4]. It will be examined to highlight how everyday rhythms, social expectations, and embodied health

[4] Accompaniments here are items such as biscuits, savoury snacks called namkeens or any other food item that is culturally acceptable to be eaten with tea.

norms intertwine to make tea time a meaningful and recognisable social practice in urban middle-class Indian households.

The practice-theoretical framework enabled this study to examine how tea time is maintained, adapted, and reproduced in everyday socially organised domestic life. The theory is explained in detail in this chapter, where it is situated within broader scholarly debates in sociology and food studies and operationalised in Chapter 3 to guide data collection and analysis.

2.3 Studying Eating and Consumption: Nutrients to Social Meanings

Eating is one of the quotidian forms of consumption that has increasingly gained scholarly attention. Since the 1980s, food has been a topic of investigation across multiple disciplines, including nutrition science, public health, and anthropology. The literature on food studies is vast and widespread. The evolution of food studies has moved beyond production, distribution, accessibility, and consumption to engage with food as a social and cultural phenomenon. However, the centrality of food to food studies was established through contributions from the fields of agro-food research, political economy, nutrition, and consumption studies (Warde, 2016).

Agro-food research focused on production and post-war food security, emphasising the role of food in building societal resilience (Guptill et al., 2013). Medical, nutritional, and biological research contributed to viewing food as a means of enhancing well-being and life expectancy (Mennell et al., 1992). The anthropological perspectives examined food as central to understanding the culture and human-nature systems(Murcott, 1995).

Subsequently, earlier work in the sociology of food drew on anthropological insights that treated food as a site for studying social classification, symbolic systems, and cultural structures (Mennell et al., 1992). Durkheim's (1912) analysis of rituals and collective life highlighted how shared practices generate social cohesion. Structural anthropologists, such as Lévi-Strauss and Mary Douglas, analysed food rituals and habits as systems in which culinary traditions, food taboos, and commensality reveal societal and cultural structures (Douglas, 1966; Lévi-Strauss, 1965). Later, historical sociological works of Goody (1982), Bourdieu (1984) and Mennell (1996) shifted the analytical focus from symbolic structures to

class differentiation. Food was analysed as a means of demonstrating patterns of cuisine, hierarchy, and culture (Mennell et al., 1992; Warde, 2016).

In the Indian context, scholars such as R.S. Khare and Arjun Appadurai extended these insights by emphasising the roles of religion, caste, nationalism, and aspiration in shaping eating in the Indian subcontinent (Appadurai, 1988; Douglas, 1966; Khare, 1980; Lévi-Strauss, 1965).

Together, these bodies of work established eating as a culturally situated and socially organised activity, laying the foundation for examining everyday food consumption beyond nutritional concerns (Anderson, 2014; Delormier et al., 2009; Lupton, 1996; Warde, 2016).

2.4 Key Sociological Inputs on Eating

Food sociology has increasingly contributed to research on food and its relationship with social identities, cultural norms, and the organisation of everyday lives (Mennell et al., 1992). Interrogating not only what people eat but also how, when, and why they eat has increased interest and awareness of culture, food, and nutrition worldwide (Anderson, 2014).

Current sociological studies have refined the earlier insights in food sociology by focusing on the everyday, routinised, and embodied domains of eating (Warde, 2016). Studies that analysed eating have enabled a renewed focus on social meaning and embodied practices, moving beyond nutrition (Delormier et al., 2009; Murcott, 2019; Spaargaren, Lamers, et al., 2016). Routine meals became the site of sociological examination, highlighting the role of automaticity, materiality, and shared meanings that underscore eating as a practice (Whillans, 2024).

The current dissertation draws on insights from these ideas.

2.5 Current research on everyday eating

Meals have occupied a central role in the sociological analysis of food and eating (Whillans, 2024). Functioning as key sites through which social organisation, routine, and meaning are examined, they are established as the routinised observation of similar eating patterns (Warde & Yates, 2017). Most notably conceptualised by Mary Douglas (1972) as a socially structured event laden with cultural meanings, meals were positioned as analytical units to

study social order. Everyday meals are sites for engaging with family members and organising daily life (Murcott, 2019). Family meals, in particular, have been analysed as occasions that help form and maintain familial bonds and identities (Cappellini & Parsons, 2012). They can give an insight into the mundane norms that guide everyday eating (Halkier, 2022) but also reflect the adjustments in the norm throughout the lifecourse (Nyberg et al., 2018).

Meals have also been examined as sites where care, responsibility, and domestic labour are enacted, particularly through the everyday practices of feeding (DeVault, 1991). Beyond the household, sociological studies of everyday eating have addressed broader structural dimensions, including socioeconomic inequalities (Halkier & Holm, 2021) and challenges of maintaining healthy diets in low-income households (Ditlevsen et al., 2023).

The research on family meals and everyday routines has been central in illustrating mundane, tacit and embodied practices of food and eating; however, fewer studies situated the in-between meal events, which are equally regular and normatively important (Warde & Yates, 2017a). Tea time sits uneasily within these frameworks; it is neither a formal meal nor nutritionally insignificant, yet it plays a regular role in organising everyday rhythms, social interactions, and consumption.

2.6 Theoretical Approaches to Studying Eating Practices

The sociological analysis of food has long emphasised the automaticity of eating practices. In *Distinction* (1984), Bourdieu highlighted the automaticity that food habits carry owing to the embodied taste and forms of cultural capital (Warde, 2016), indicating how class heirarchies are produced and enacted through taste (Germov & Williams, 2017). This concept of automaticity contributed to the conceptualisation of practices as routinised actions and socially organised activity, which later informed the development of practice theoretical approaches to evaluate contemporary consumption practices (Schatzki, 2002; Spaargaren, Lamers, et al., 2016).

Practice-theoretical approaches have been particularly influential in analysing everyday eating habits, including family meals, commensality, eating out, and routine food practices. (Delormier et al., 2009; Germov & Williams, 2017; Shove et al., 2012; Wills et al., 2011).

2.6.1 Practice Theoretical Framework

Practice theoretical approaches entered the discussion of consumption in the late 1990s as a way to move beyond the post-modern focus on individuals as rational consumers. While the theory has evolved through multiple contributions from different theorists and lacks a single unified definition, its emphasis on the central role of practice both as the site and unit of analysis has provided an analytical lens beyond the individualist and structural explanations of consumption (Warde et al., 2017). As defined by Andreas Reckwitz (2002, p. 250)

> *"A practice is thus a routinised way in which bodies are moved, objects are handled, subjects are treated, and things are described, and the world is understood."*

This framework is built on the combined theoretical elements drawn from the works of Bourdieu (1984) and Giddens (1984), with more recent conceptualisation from Reckwitz (2002b), Schatzki (1996), Warde (2005) and Shove (2012). These practice theorists have contributed to providing analytical and methodological approaches to understanding practices, highlighting the need to analyse the routine activities that are socially organised and sustained.

Practices, in general terms, are understood as the expected or habitual way of doing something or the repetition of a certain activity to make it consistent and stable. Similarly, in consumption studies, practices are seen as both an entity and a performance. Practice as an entity is a configuration of the constitutive elements that helps it to be produced, stabilised and reproduced. However, practice as a performance becomes a site where the human agents enact, conditioned by their shared understandings, available structures and end goals they want to engage in (Reckwitz, 2002b; Schatzki, 1996; Shove et al., 2012; Warde, 2016).

The analysis of the regularised activities involves understanding the social order and human activities. Therefore, practice theorists identify practices as the main unit of social analysis. The individual is seen as the 'doer' and 'carrier' of the practices, and the attention is focused on the practices as entities and performance (Warde, 2016). Accordingly, the everyday activities, like eating, cleaning, or commuting, the activities that are automatically repeated

and routinised, dispersed or integrated through space and time, are conceptualised as 'practices'(Spaargaren, Lamers, et al., 2016).

Schatzki (1996) defined practices as a "spatio-temporally dispersed nexus of doings and sayings", and for this study, this definition serves as the guiding anchor. Practice theory suggests that patterns of health and well-being are influenced by the daily practices that are enacted by individuals. These practices are not single behaviours or one-off choices, but the practices we carry out every day. These practices are made up of many small actions, influenced by the space we're in, the time of day, the people around us, and the tools or materials we have (Blue et al., 2016; Delormier et al., 2009; Ditlevsen et al., 2023; Warde, 2016). This approach views consumption, like eating or buying food, as an integral part of broader social, cultural, economic, and material systems.

2.6.2 Key Studies influencing the research

This study will be mostly drawing from the work of Warde and Halkier to define the practice, focusing on the elements of understanding (know-how, practical interpretation), procedures (rules, principles, instructions), engagements (affective and normative orientations) and social interactions (Halkier, 2020; Warde, 2005; Welch & Warde, 2014).

As practices can't be examined in isolation without examining the practices that coexist and interact with them, tea time is conceptualised as a compound practice. Compound practices are a collection of interrelated and codependent practices that overlap, coexist and are mutually inclusive.

Warde's analyses of eating out and drinking practices in the UK provided a practice-theoretical model for analysing routine consumption (Warde, 1997; Warde et al., 2023; Warde & Yates, 2017). By conceptualising eating as a regularised but weakly regulated practice, Warde highlights the role of repetition in maintaining the stability of practices. Halkier's research further investigates how mundane normativity and social interactions, key to understanding everyday eating, provide further insights into how food practices sustain social relationships and align with collective expectations (Halkier, 2020, 2022). Lastly, Lupton's analysis highlighted how food choices are directly related to health discourse, identity formation and bodily regulation. Her analysis, informed by a qualitative approach,

demonstrated how eating is deeply entrenched in the social construction of food meanings, as revealed through participants' narratives. (Lupton, 1994, 1996). Together, these scholars provide a multi-dimensional framework for analysing eating as a site where sociality, health and everyday order are negotiated.

2.7 Conclusion and Research Gap

In response to the above, the public health campaigns in India have adopted Behaviour Change Communication (BCC) strategies that target individuals using fact-based educational messaging. While there is little information regarding the studies that inform these interventions, the method applied is meant to evoke deliberate and conscious decision-making on the part of the consumer. The leading initiative 'Eat Right India', spearheaded by the Ministry of Health and Welfare, has had a focus on improving infrastructure to promote the sale of safe food, scale-up of food fortification, informational campaigns to reduce the intake of trans fats, salt and sugar, and food waste management. The informational campaign uses infomercials to inform consumers about the effects of reducing salt, sugar and trans-fats in their diets (*Eat Right India*, n.d.).

The good intention behind such interventions takes little or no consideration of the fact that everyday activities, such as eating, are habitual. Family traditions and group dynamics play a pivotal role in the formation of food habits (Bailey et al., 2018). Daily food practices are often incorporated into various activities such as working, socialising, and celebrating. The way people eat is guided by social norms and conventions that differ across cultures and within different contexts (Warde, 2016). Therefore, policy efforts that ignore these sociocultural dimensions may fall short of achieving behavioural change.

Therefore, despite growing public health awareness and behavioural interventions, the changing patterns of food consumption in India, particularly among the middle class, remain underexplored in their socio-cultural dimensions. Much of the existing discourse relies on nutritional metrics or economic indicators, often ignoring the deeper social meanings and habitual nature of food practices. Tea time, as a quotidian yet culturally rich practice, offers a unique window into these dynamics.

This study contributes to filling that gap by examining tea time as a practice among the Indian urban middle class, using practice theoretical frameworks. It foregrounds the role of routine, sociality and embodied regulation in shaping food practices and interrogates the implications for health, policy, and everyday life. In doing so, it seeks to move beyond reductive policy models and illuminate the complex intersections of culture, consumption, and social norms in contemporary India.

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Methodology

Chapter 3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The empirical basis for this research involved several methodological decisions that were made during the duration of this PhD. This chapter provides an in-depth explanation for those decisions and outlines the step-by-step methodological approach that was employed to investigate tea time among urban middle-class participants.

3.2 Methodological reasoning

The methodology selected for this research is grounded in a constructionist epistemological perspective, which orients us toward how social reality and knowledge are produced and made meaningful (Flick, 2024). From this perspective, activities such as eating practices are not treated as objective entities existing independently of social actors, but as outcomes of ongoing interpretation, interaction, and reproduction within specific cultural and historical contexts (Berger & Luckmann, 1967).

In their foundational work, Berger and Luckmann (1967) conceptualised constructionism to recognise that everyday realities are socially produced through shared meanings, routines, and taken-for-granted assumptions. This closely aligns with the research requirements. As already established, tea time practices are socially embedded and culturally specific; therefore, in constructing knowledge of this phenomenon, this approach allows the study to examine not only what participants do during tea time but also how they make sense of these practices and why they remain meaningful through individuals' interpretations. In this way, participants' accounts are treated as situated interpretations rather than as transparent reflections of behaviour (Silverman & Schmieder, 2022).

As highlighted above, I want to shed light on everyday practices; therefore, approaching my research from a constructionist perspective helps me focus on:

- individuals' interpretation of their tea-time rituals and context
- narratives and experiences that shape their tea-time practices
- their reflection on the practice and background.

Nevertheless, the study recognises that constructionism entails challenges that may affect various stages of the study. In this study, the focus on middle-class tea drinkers is understood as an analytically bounded choice that enables an in-depth exploration of shared yet varied configurations of practice. It leads to a categorical manipulation of the research, introducing bias into the study. However, rather than treating this as a source of bias, it is treated as a methodological condition that requires transparency and reflexive engagement (Potter & Robles, 2022).

The researcher designs a questionnaire to address their research question; therefore, it was important to be aware of the role these questions play in constructing answers (Potter & Robles, 2022). Since research questions can embody 'presuppositions' and 'preferences', which can signal to participants that they should respond in ways desired by the interviewer. The interview questionnaire was kept open-ended, and participants were encouraged to describe their own narratives, creating an interactional space that allows for the co-construction of meaning.

Qualitative research has not developed guidelines for designing questions; it offers considerable flexibility in data generation. As a consequence of that, through leading interview questions, interviewees might be signalled to provide factual and expected observations. Therefore, care was taken to direct the interviewees away from discussing beliefs, facts, or attitudes. The descriptions and narratives were treated as situated, interactionally produced accounts and approached with transparency and neutrality.

Throughout the research process, a reflexive and critical stance involved attending to how elements of practice were articulated, enacted, and reflected upon, and how cultural and social meanings were invoked in participants' accounts, which is elaborated further in the subsequent sections.

3.3 Research Design

The study adopted a qualitative research design in order to gather the interpretation of the participants about their routinised eating practices. Informed by prior research that employed

qualitative methods to analyse food practices, the research design was chosen to examine Indian tea-time practices as they are lived and enacted, foregrounding practitioners' own understandings, routines, and negotiations.

As qualitative research design enables the incorporation of participants' perspectives by privileging their voices and experiences, the methods of interviewing and observation thus allowed an in-depth exploration of participants' reasoning (Denzin, 2018). The reasons people follow certain food-related actions may not always be apparent or understood by an external perspective, but they are nevertheless deeply meaningful within their contexts (Guptill et al., 2013). Since the aim was to acknowledge the value of lay knowledge and everyday practices, a qualitative study seemed the best fit for my research.

The decision to conduct a qualitative study was also guided by an intentional departure from the top-down approach that frames participants' perspectives through predefined analytical categories, instead allowing meanings to emerge from everyday practice (Charmaz, 2012).

Therefore, a qualitative research design helped this study to understand food practices not just as consumption but as an intricate interaction of routine, habit, and cultural significance, shaped through everyday forms of agency (Halkier et al., 2011; Warde, 2016).

3.4 Practice Theoretical Framework

As detailed in Chapter 2, this study is grounded in a practical theoretical framework, which provides a conceptual basis for understanding tea time as a routinised social practice composed of material elements, competencies, and cultural meanings. While practices are always interconnected and embedded within wider configurations of daily life, tea time was analytically approached as a compound practice, comprising interrelated activities such as preparing tea, selecting accompaniments, hosting others, and managing bodily or temporal concerns.

Drawing particularly on Warde (2016), the empirical design of this study attended to their shared structural properties (e.g., understandings, procedures, and engagements) and the performance of practices (e.g., how tea-time unfolds in households). These dimensions

informed the development of the interview guide, shaped the observation strategies, and guided the coding framework used in thematic analysis.

3.5 Qualitative research framework

The research strategy for this study followed the framework proposed by Blaike and Priest (2019) to design the qualitative analysis, as a set of interrelated questions and tasks guiding the progression from research purpose to data generation and analysis (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1 Questions and tasks in designing research (based on Blaikie and Priest, 2019: 36)

Three basic questions a research design will have to answer		Four research design tasks
1. What will be studied?		1. Focusing on the purpose of the study (e.g. problem to be studied, questions to be answered)
2. Why will it be studied?		2. Framing (logics and epistemologies)
3. How will it be studied?	Five further questions:	3. Selecting (data types, forms and sources)
	- What is the logic of inquiry? - What are the epistemological questions that are adopted? - Where will the data come from? - How will the data be collected and analysed? - When will each stage of the research be carried out?	4. Distilling (timing and doing of collecting and analysing data and answering the questions)

This framework was used as an organising device to ensure coherence between corresponding design tasks such as framing, selecting, and distilling research processes.

As outlined above, the research design involves four key tasks: focusing the purpose of the study, framing the epistemological and logical orientation, selecting appropriate data sources and methods, and distilling the sequencing of data collection and analysis. The first two questions in this framework – *what* and *why* have already been discussed in Chapter 2. Since the study focuses on understanding everyday tea time through routine, social norms, and lived experience, the next section addresses the remaining design considerations, namely, *how* the research was conducted.

3.6 Research Location

Data collection for the study was conducted in New Delhi, India, from January to April 2024 and from January to March 2025. Located in the northern part of India, with an estimated population of over 11 million[5](Census of India, 2011), Delhi is the National Capital Territory and a megacity. It is a Tier 1 city with residents from diverse religions, states, and cultures. The city is characterised by high levels of urbanisation, social heterogeneity, and diverse food practices shaped by migration, employment patterns, and changing domestic arrangements.

This made the city an analytically rich site for exploring how practices are stabilised, adapted, and negotiated in everyday life. The researcher's familiarity with the local language and cultural context facilitated access to participants and supported a nuanced interpretation of accounts. This positionality is treated not as a matter of convenience but as a resource that enabled engagement with participants' descriptions of everyday practices while remaining reflexively attentive to the research process.

3.7 Sampling strategy and recruitment

The participants in the study were recruited using purposive sampling. The sampling focused on adults aged 25–65 years living in Delhi who regularly consumed tea. Participants were

[5] 11 million in 2011 census and the next census was cancelled due to COVID. The estimated current population is over 30 million (World Population Review, 2026). The next census is planned end of 2026

recruited via a Google Form distributed via WhatsApp, primarily among urban residents in Delhi. The participation was voluntary, and the form was used to identify individuals whose everyday routines included regular tea consumption.

A total of 26 individuals filled out the Google Form to participate in the study, of whom 15 participants were interviewed (Table 2). The selection aimed to ensure variation across age and gender, enabling comparison across different configurations of everyday practice. Data collection continued until thematic sufficiency was reached, that is, when additional interviews no longer generated substantively new insights relevant to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Name	**Participant ID**	**Age**	**Gender**	**Occupation**
Ananya	P01	33	F	School Teacher
Saman	P02	35	F	Healthcare Professional
Akshay	P03	29	M	Academic Coordinator
Radhika	P04	31	F	Manager
Yachita	P05	29	F	Associate
Vaibhav	P06	27	M	IT professional
Shikha	P07	45	F	Team Lead
Nida	P08	62	F	Home maker
Afzal	P09	67	M	Retired
Papori	P10	55	F	Costume Designer
Manju	P11	64	F	Home maker
Nihal	P12	42	M	Theatre Artist
Pratibha	P13	48	F	Psychotherapist
Rita	P14	41	F	Manager
Shubham	P15	24	M	Research Fellow

Table 2: Details of the participants interviewed (Surnames are not provided for anonymisation)

As the sampling method was purposive, it aimed to select individuals who demonstrated active awareness of their dietary habits, had a certain level of education, and were not significantly constrained by financial or resource limitations.

The chosen age group was selected to capture participants who navigate a balance between traditional eating practices and the demands of a modern, fast-paced lifestyle. This purposive strategy enabled engagement with individuals whose daily routines included regular tea-time practices, without limiting selection to any particular level of education or awareness. The study consciously moves beyond limiting explanations of food choice to variables such as education, knowledge, or financial constraints, seeking a richer understanding of the multifaceted reasons behind why people eat what they eat.

3.8 Data collection methods

Data collection, guided by a practice-theoretical lens, emphasises the interplay between material elements, competencies, and meanings in everyday routines. This framework informed both the selection of methods and the approach to gathering and interpreting data. The data collection methods were guided by the three core pillars of ethnography: experiencing, enquiring, and examining, to facilitate comprehensive discursive documentation of practice (Atkinson et al., 2001). As past qualitative research on food practices has employed combinations of interviews, observations, and visual methods to capture the complexity of daily routines (Halkier et al., 2011; Magaudda, 2011; Truninger, 2011), similar methods were used to explore both performative and entity-based dimensions of food practices.

Given the aim of this research to attain a nuanced understanding of both the routinised performances and the underlying dispositions within tea-time food-consumption practices, semi-structured interviews and participant observations were employed as key data-collection methods (Atkinson et al., 2001), drawing on culturally oriented food-consumption studies such as Halkier (2022).

3.8.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

Participants who signed up for the interview via Google Forms were sent an email to confirm a date and time for a semi-structured interview and to sign an informed consent form. Although the interviews followed a semi-structured format, an interview guide was developed to ensure that all relevant points were addressed. The guide was developed based on the literature review (As discussed in Chapter 2) and refined through two preliminary interviews with experts in food culture.

The interviews began with an introduction describing the procedure, followed by questions about the interviewers' backgrounds to elicit deeper context regarding their daily lives, circumstances, and perceptions. These interviews allow participants to reflect on their tea-time practices while providing the flexibility to probe deeper into specific areas of interest that arise during the conversation. The interview guide includes questions designed to uncover the social, cultural, and emotional dimensions of tea-time, such as:

- "Can you describe your typical tea-time routine?"
- "What do you normally consume with tea?"
- "How does tea time fit into your daily life or during social interactions?"

Interviews were conducted at participants' homes or in a café, based on their comfort, with three interviews completed online via Google Meet because participants couldn't meet face-to-face but were interested in participating in the research. The interviews were recorded on a recorder, and observations were noted down in a notebook. Most interviews lasted around 65 minutes, with the longest one lasting around 90 minutes. Thirteen interviews were conducted in English, and two were bilingual (Hindi and English). All the participants received an Amazon voucher of INR 2500 as a non-coercive incentive for their participation.

3.8.2 Observations and Photos

Data collection also involved conducting observations alongside the interview process. The observation included information about the participant's surroundings, environment, gestures, bodily actions, expressions and gesticulations. Detailed field notes were taken to

document these observations, with particular attention to material culture (e.g., types of food served, tea utensils used) and the social interactions surrounding the practice.

Additionally, participants were invited to share photographs of their tea-time setup at the time they returned the signed consent form, allowing the study to document the foods and arrangements present in their everyday tea-time routines. The ownership of sharing the picture lay in the hands of the participants. While the images might have represented a clean, idealised tea time setup, nonetheless, it provided valuable insight into the material and aesthetic dimensions of tea time. These images served as prompts during interviews, allowing participants to reflect on the significance of the items displayed and how they relate to their eating practices. This method added a visual dimension to the study, offering deeper insight into the symbolic and aesthetic aspects of tea-time.

3.8.3 Data Analysis

Participants are referred to using numerical identifiers (P01–P15) to maintain anonymity and to foreground shared practices rather than individual biographies. The analysis was conducted to interpret participants' accounts meaningfully, to preserve the study's theoretical integrity and to engage reflexively with the interview process through iterative refinement of the questions (Flick, 2024). This approach enabled me to trace how participants articulated their connection to tea-time.

While I employed Shove's (2003) framework of elements to guide my interviews, my analysis and findings utilise Warde's (2005) elements to describe the practices. The triad of material, competence and meanings (Shove, 2003) provided an orienting framework for interview design and preliminary analysis. However, the participants' narratives were dominated by what is a normal way to do tea-time, how it ought to be done and to what ends, which aligns with Warde's elements of procedures, understandings and engagements. The accounts of participants did not describe materials distinct from the practice, making it entwined with the procedures. Similarly, the competence was part of the understanding and norms, and the meaning was overlapping everywhere, but most clearly with engagements. Therefore, to capture the nuances of the normative and procedural accounts, I adopted Warde's typology, which focuses on shared know-how and social appropriateness (understandings), tacit rules

and habitual methods of doing things (procedures) and teleo-affective ends of action (engagements).

Data were analysed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke (2006). Their method allowed for the identification of key themes and patterns across the interviews, observations, and images. The process followed the steps outlined below:

1. *Familiarisation with the data*: Transcripts and field notes were read multiple times to gain a thorough understanding of the content.
2. *Generating initial codes*: Data were systematically coded based on recurring concepts related to routines, materials, social interactions, and cultural meanings.
3. *Searching for themes*: Codes were grouped into broader themes that reflect the key aspects of tea-time practices (e.g., ritualisation of tea-time, social bonding, symbolic meanings of food).
4. *Reviewing themes*: Themes were refined by cross-checking them with the raw data to ensure they accurately represented the participants' experiences.
5. *Defining and naming themes*: Clear definitions were developed for each theme, ensuring coherence across the dataset.

The use of interviews and observations enabled triangulation and strengthened the interpretive validity of findings.

3.8.4 Data Management Plan

During my research, data were collected in multiple forms:

a) audio recordings of interviews (.wav or .mp3)

b) photographs of tea-time settings (.jpg or .png)

c) observation notes (.txt or .docx).

Each type of data was stored in appropriate formats, including .wav or .mp3 for audio, .jpg or .png for photographs, and .txt, .docx, .csv, or .xlsx for textual data. Audio recordings were transcribed into .txt or .docx formats for analysis.

All data were securely stored and regularly backed up throughout the research. Digital files were saved in password-protected files on my personal computer, an external cloud drive,

and JLU institutional cloud storage, while hard copies, such as observation notes and consent forms, were kept filed. Backups of both digital and physical data were maintained to prevent loss.

To protect participant privacy, identifying data, such as consent forms, was stored separately from anonymised data, including audio transcripts and observation notes. Both sets were encrypted with access restricted to the researcher only. Ethical safeguards, including anonymisation and GDPR-compliant consent procedures, were applied throughout the study to maintain participant confidentiality and protect sensitive information.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

During the design and implementation of this study, guidelines of ethical research in sociology were diligently followed (British Sociological Association, 2017). The participants were sent the informed consent form, which explained the research, data use, data management, and other relevant information. Once they signed and sent the informed consent form, the interviews were conducted. Most of the participants were getting interviewed for a research study for the first time, so they weren't sure what did the interview entail. Therefore, at the beginning of the interviews, participants were re-informed about the research aim and the data management plan and were asked for permission to record and retain the transcripts. They were also reminded of their right to decline participation at any time.

While the participants were not hesitant to discuss their practices, they were unsure how the interviews would proceed. This led to some hesitation when asked for their consent to record the interviews. Therefore, in those cases, the researcher engaged in informal conversation and shared relevant personal experiences. After a few minutes of general conversation, the respondents became comfortable and continued discussing their tea time. Over time, this approach was standardised: interviewer and interviewee engaged in general conversation for the first 5-10 mins, after which the discussion continued as a formal interview, with recording initiated. The confidentiality and privacy of interviewees were respected throughout the process and continue to be maintained after the conclusion of the thesis, in accordance with the 'Statutes of the Justus Liebig University Giessen for ensuring good scientific practice'(Justus Liebig University, 2024).

3.10 Positionality, reflexivity and authenticity

This research is built through the foundational familiarity with the food culture, eating rituals and food practices in India. It is the contextual insight and familiarity that provided easier access to the participants and understand their context more closely. My position as an insider provided a distinct advantage in being able to showcase these practices through an inward-facing lens. As an 'insider', I was able to navigate the space of cultural contestation and identify the different performances of the tea-time practices. It was easy to develop the researcher-respondent relationship due to the familiarity with the language and the trust people had in me due to the common connections we shared. However, this necessitated that reflexivity had to maintained throughout the research to minimise the influence of self-assumptions, judgements and preconceived notions on data collection and interpretation.

Since participants were recruited through a Google Form shared on a WhatsApp group through a friend. It put me in a special position were the

"*researcher is working, at the deepest level, within their own 'backyard'; that is, a contemporary cultural space within which the researcher's personal relationships are deeply embedded in the field; where one's quotidian interactions and performances of identity are made visible; where the researcher has been and remains a key social actor within the field and thus becomes engaged in a process of self-interpretation to some degree; and where the researcher is privy to undocumented historical knowledge of the people and cultural phenomenon being studied*" (p.9)(Taylor, 2011).

While having the 'insider' position, allowed the observation and comprehension of several nuanced tacit information, gestures, words and knowledge. However, it did come with its own set of interpretive challenges. The familiarity with the culture could create a high chance of ignoring the subtle, mundane and everyday bias or an unsympathetic critique of the practices (Taylor, 2011). Being aware of this limitation deliberate strategies were employed to avoid bias, like participants were made aware that I do not consume *chai* (since I am lactose intolerant) which prompted them to articulate their practices in detail. They assumed I do not understand the affective emotions attached with tea and detailed their experiences better.

Care was also taken to not mention any normative ideas about *health or unhealthy food* during the interview to avoid any signal to evaluate the healthiness of the participants.

I am aware that my familiarity with the culture, practices and environment can lead to blurring the lines between rationality and objectivity. To manage this, I was presented as a researcher based in Germany, adopting a professional demeanour marked by formal clothing, a neutral accent, and expressed curiosity towards practices that are often experienced as routine and automatic. This positioning appeared to encourage participants to reflect more deeply on their habits and to articulate emotions, intentions, and meanings that might otherwise remain implicit.

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Analysis and Findings

Chapter 4. Analysis and Findings

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings that address the research questions about tea time, by analysing participants' accounts of their 'doings' and 'sayings'. Drawing on Warde's (2005) concepts of procedures, understandings, and engagements, this analysis dissects the elements of tea time to reveal how this practice is organised, performed, sustained, and given meaning in daily life.

Participants described their tea time as a compound practice, without separating it from the coexisting practices of work, rest, or social interaction. Tea time emerged as a bundle of interconnected activities, including buying, preparing, and consuming, that coexist and mutually shape one another. This approach helped examine how tea time is organised, stabilised, negotiated and performed within the everyday temporal, spatial and social organisation of life.

Most participants' accounts began by describing the organisation of the practice - its timing, routines, and material arrangements - before moving to the affective and personal dimensions. Their narratives elaborated how they negotiated acts of care and indulgence when performing the practice in the company of others. Therefore, it was logical to structure this chapter following the sequence that emerged during the interviews.

The first section (4.1) of this chapter analyses how tea time is described and understood by the participants. The section establishes tea time as an ordinary yet socially and culturally meaningful practice. The analysis further describes how tea time is adopted and reproduced, highlighting the procedures and norms that surround tea time and the role they play in the temporal organisation of everyday life.

The second section (4.2) investigates the role of social interactions in the adaptation and reconfiguration of tea time. It highlights the role of social coordination in structuring and stabilising the practice of tea time. The section further identifies tea time as a site of negotiation through which social order is established and maintained. The participants' accounts highlight the social expectations around hospitality and gestures of offering as a socially coordinated act.

Finally, the third section (4.3) examines tea time as a site where the everyday gestures of sharing, or abstaining, help negotiate the health norms of the participants. Through interview excerpts, these health negotiations will highlight how practices are rearranged through adaptation and can persist through the changes. The analysis will also highlight whether practices can be substituted and abandoned.

As can be seen in the diagram below, my analysis is structured around my three research questions, with each section answering one of the questions. Using the established theoretical grounding of Practice Theory, I investigate the tea time practices from everyday patterned routine to the social performance.

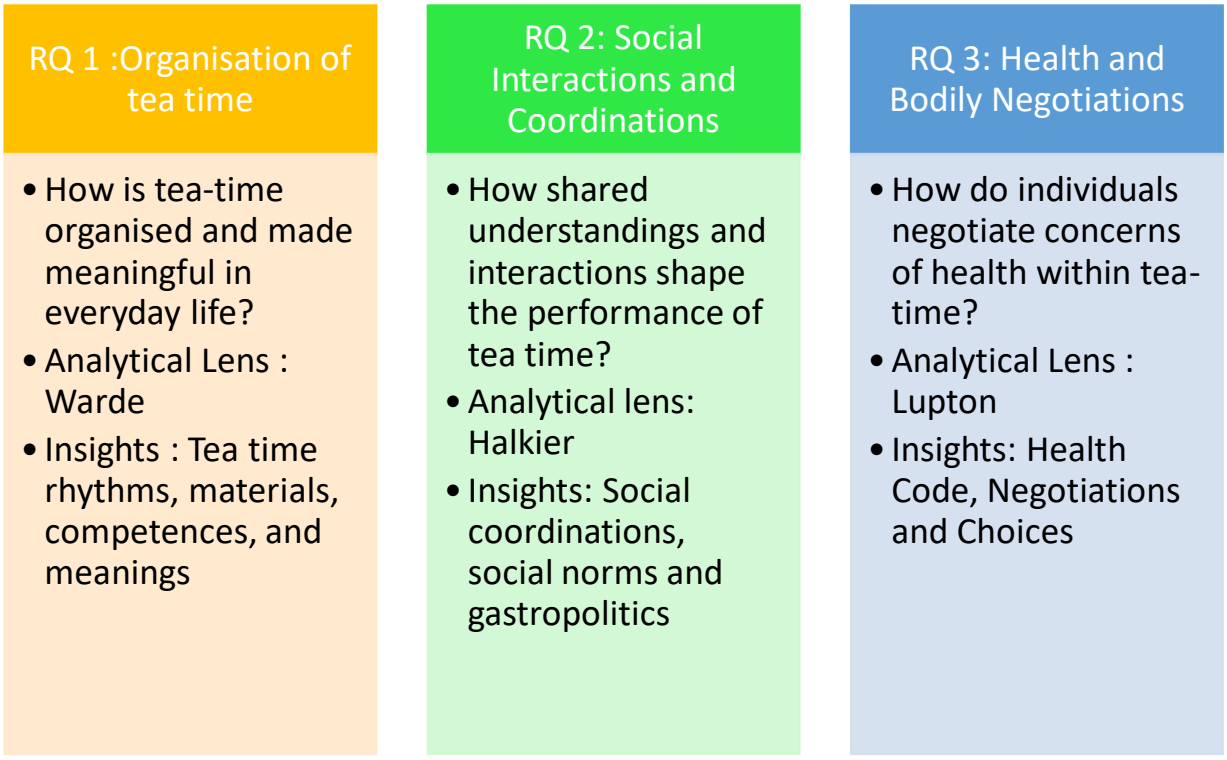


Diagram 1: Tea time as a multidimensional practice

RQ 1

Tea Time as a Practice

How is tea time organised, sustained and made meaningful in everyday life?

RQ 4.1 Introduction

This section examines tea time as a practice through qualitative inquiry, revealing the understandings, procedures and engagements that illustrate when tea drinking occurs, how it is adopted and how these elements are coordinated within broader rhythms of everyday life. This analysis shows how tea time becomes integrated into daily routines and functions as a recurring anchor within the rhythms of everyday life.

4.1.1 Tea Time as a Practice

Tea time as a practice is sustained through shared understandings, similar procedures and recurring engagements. The most common configuration of tea preparation across participants was boiling water and milk in a pot, brewed together with tea and sugar. Participants' narratives reflected the common understanding about how tea is 'normally' prepared.

> *"The tea that we have with that general Indian style of tea, where you have tea leaves and sugar and milk, etc., so that's the tea we prepare"* (P04, 31)

> *"I like boiling water and milk mixed, I boil it first, then I mix this uh, ginger and tea leaves, and some amount of sugar at the end"* (P13, 48)

A similar procedural description indicated the shared understanding of tea preparation. This procedural stability contributed to tea time existing as an 'entity' with relatively stable expectations regarding its acceptable and conventional form. This 'normal' way of making tea exhibited how tea time is most commonly recognised and understood, making it easier to emulate and repeat across different settings. It's this repetition that helps practice become internalised as part of an everyday routine and stabilised over time (Schatzki, 2002; Shove et al., 2012; Warde, 2016), hence these shared procedural understandings reflect how tea time is sustained as a recognisable practice within participants' households.

While the core procedures understandings were relatively stable, the materials (for eg. brand of tea) used in participants' tea time and the competence (exact cooking procedure) applied in preparing and consuming did vary according to factors such as company, family tradition, regional origins and even the season. Despite the variation, recurring patterns reflected that

most appropriate or expected ways of performing tea time, were both stable and flexible as practices were defined to be (Schatzki, 1996).

Across interviews, the most common accompaniment with tea was biscuit and *namkeen** (Hindi for savoury snacks), as can be seen below:

> *"Mostly either biscuits or toast. So we always take something along with tea. We never drink tea alone."* (P03, 29)

> *"Normally, tea is accompanied by biscuits and some like snack, some light namkeen snack, you know, salty, savoury snack. That could be anything. It could be chips, it could be nachos, it could be some namkeens, it could be some peanuts, salty peanuts, I mean anything savoury."* (P07, 45)

> *"There is no point in having caffeine with something healthy, so usually we just eat biscuit namkeen, and for me it's usually a piece of bread. "* (P08, 62)

Although the reasoning behind the choice of accompaniments varied across participants (section 4.2 and 4.3), there was a commonly shared understanding that tea accompanied by biscuits or namkeen represented the most socially accepted configuration of tea time consumption. The cultural norms around eating something with tea also highlighted the role of snack items such as biscuit and namkeen with tea as culturally and socially acceptable forms of convenience food in the everyday.

This resonated with Halkier (2017) discussion on normalisation of convenience food among young Danes where such food items become socially acceptable and expected in specific everyday contexts, even while their use can remain contested. Similarly, in the accounts above everyday consumption of biscuits and namkeen was not necessarily seen as problematic but rather part of the performance of tea time.

The exhibited understanding that tea requires something to be consumed along with it did vary based on the social context but practitioners sustained tea time by adapting the practice (Section 4.2). Hence establishing that while the configurations with tea vary, the shared understanding deems the participants eligible to react appropriately to different situations (Nicolini et al., 2025). These variation in tea time is further explored in the section on social

interaction (4.2) and health negotiations (4.3), which examined how tea time is maintained as a practice through ongoing adaptations.

4.1.2 Organising Tea Time: Routines, Rhythms and Everyday Order

Routine is defined as the sequence of activities that structure the day (Southerton, 2006). Across interviews, tea time was situated sequentially within the structure of the day. Tea was usually consumed twice as part of a daily routine. The participants described this typical twice-a-day ritual using words like 'regular', 'usual', or 'normal', as seen in the excerpts below:

> *"Regularly, I have milk tea two times in a day. My morning starts with it, like it's the first thing that I'll have (…) on a normal working day, the evening tea will be around 4 or 5 O'clock."* (P01, 33)

> *"I take my first cup of tea around 9:00 - 9:30 (…) Then, once I go back home, usually around 17:30 – 18:00, I have my yoga class, and after that I take tea."* (P05, 29)

> *"Usually, I have tea two times a day, first in the morning. It's the first thing after waking up(…). The second time of tea is in the evening, mostly when I'm back from the office. So, I reach home by, I think, between 16.30 – 18.00, and this is the usual time for me to have tea again."* (P03, 29)

As seen above, tea drinking appeared to be a regularised daily activity across participants' accounts. It occurred at similar times during the day and was closely coordinated with other routine activities, such as beginning the day or returning from work. Morning tea was commonly positioned as the first activity after waking, while evening tea occurred in the late afternoon or early evening, often coinciding with a pause from work or household tasks. The recurrence of a similar activity at similar times signalled a repeated pattern of performance. Warde (2016) termed it as the routinisation of eating practices, where repetition stabilises both the timing and the performance of the practice.

The temporal rhythm of everyday life is characterised by practices that occupy relatively fixed timing during the day (Southerton, 2006). The consistent placement of tea time in the morning and evening thus signalled the socially acceptable temporal organisation of tea time.

However, as tea time was neither work-related nor externally regularised; its temporal organisation depended on coordinating practices throughout the day (Shove et al., 2012; Southerton et al., 2011).

The sequencing of everyday activities provides a sense of stability and order in life (Giddens, 1984) and through repeated performance, these patterns get internalised. This leads to individuals performing these action automatically reducing the need for everyday deliberation and developing the tacit knowledge that guides everyday actions (Schatzki, 2002). As Alan Warde notes in his book Practice of Eating (2016), repetition is critical for forming practices. It is repetition that leads to forming automaticity. Tea time, organised similarly across the day through repetition becomes taken for granted. This taken-for-granted automaticity was also evident in the participants' frequent use of terms such as 'regular' and 'normal', often without further elaboration.

These terms reflected participants' assumption of a shared cultural background, albeit implicitly, signalling the expectations regarding common understanding of how and when tea time occurs.

4.1.3 Tempo of Tea Time

Beyond marking specific hours, tea also regulated the tempo of the day. Here, tempo is not referring to the clock time but to the intensity, rush or pace experienced by the participants in their everyday life. Across accounts, interviewees described tea as the beverage that evoked a feeling of refreshment. Owing to the way tea was placed in their daily life structure, the same item meant different things at different times; marking the importance of the tacit understandings that sustain these practices over time (Warde, 2014).

> *"I have a habit, I need two teas morning and evening. That's two teas I need, otherwise I start feeling sleepy. (…) So teatime is a ritual at our place to sit together in the evening, usually."* (P02, 35)

> *"Tea is like that accelerator or the push for me (…) I also feel it's like a meditation in the morning. (…) And in the evening, I feel, I associate it with*

more, like all the hustle and bustle that's happening in my mind. It's the ten minutes where I won't do anything and just sit with it." (P01, 33)

"Yeah, basically self-care is one thing which is kind of connected to the morning tea, definitely, it's relaxation or evening it's relaxation, but morning it's comfort. It's me time. It's self-care" (P13, 48)

The morning tea provided the orientation and readiness for the day's first set of responsibilities. It acted as a preparatory moment before entering the structured time of work for office goers, while for the homemakers not governed by an official work schedule, it served as a brief break before or after the onset of domestic work, mostly managing the household. Alternatively, the evening tea in most accounts was associated with winding down, relaxing, taking a break, and a moment of calm.

Tea time did not just occur during these times but also helped mark the transition between work and rest. The understanding behind consuming tea in the morning was the acceleration, the kick, the energy that prepped you for the day ahead; while the evening tea represented deceleration and closure of the workday for the office goers, and a symbolic pause for the homemakers.

From a practice theory perspective, these affective orientations were not just individual emotional states but shared understandings that helped the organisation and reproduction of tea time over time. The temporal organisation of the day is based on priority activities that are fixed and other activities that can be shifted around. Tea time flexibly allowed for absorbing the variation in the daily schedule by preserving its understandings (Reckwitz, 2002b; Shove et al., 2012; Southerton, 2006; Warde, 2016).

While the temporal organisation of tea time revealed how the practice structures the rhythm of everyday life, it also raised questions about how such regularity is established and sustained. The following section, therefore, turns to the processes through which tea time is adopted, learned, and transmitted, becoming a taken-for-granted part of everyday routines.

4.1.4 Tea Time Practices: Adoption and Intergenerational Transmission

Participants' description of their tea time routine was non-reflexive, signalling the embeddedness of tea time in their everyday lives. However, most struggled to recall how tea drinking first became part of their routine. Most of them had no precise starting point, but they indicated the gradual adoption of the practice through observation and repetition of the practices that existed around them. When asked about how did the start drinking tea, the participants replied:

> *"I think during my school days, umm, maybe I think grade 8 or grade 10 somewhere… so we were studying in those days….earlier I would never want tea, but I think the idea of having tea came from the people saying that drinking tea helps you not be sleepy. Then it gradually started…..I started enjoying its flavour, and when I also saw that, OK, when you have tea together, you can enjoy conversations, etc, it started I…. I started cherishing it a lot more."* (P04, 31)

> *"So I think it started with…umm… my mother is a tea lover, and her side of the family is a tea lover…so then…. I think after my 12th, I started hanging out more…. like when I started college during my vacations… I was fully present at home (…). The bonding at home happens over tea only"* (P01, 33)

It was evident that most participants were gradually recruited adopted the tea time gradually through everyday participation. The gradual recruitment into performing the practice, referenced family members and shared knowledge. The practice was not explicitly taught or reflexively learned, but the participants were recruited into the practice through repeated exposure and engagement. This non-eventful mode of adoption underscored tea time as a practice was taken for granted through habituation that required little deliberation. However, it is the repetition that leads to the habituation of the practice in the everyday life of the new practitioners (Noble & Watkins, 2003).

Since tea time as a practice was not explicitly stated separately from the interconnected practices that cluster around the consumption of tea. The participants' accounts confirmed the adoption of those related practices, such as the preparation of tea, accompaniments

consumed and items bought, which were also adopted, absorbed and repeated. It was an embodied condition, as can be seen in the excerpts below:

> *"I never reflected much on this (...) But in my brain, the conditioning is like this. That tea without biscuits or without a snack is incomplete (…). When we were kids, my mother was the major motivator towards tea for all of us. She loves tea. So I think our meal times were like this, that you have lunch between 13:00 and 14:00… and then around 17:00 you have tea with some snacks…. between 17:00 and 18:00 and then dinner at 20:00."* (P01, 33)

Here, the act of eating something with the tea formed a part of the tea time, which was also adopted from the family. This reflected the embeddedness of the shared understanding of what is an acceptable way of doing tea time, learned from the family.

Families are a key site to transmit practices to children, and mothers play a key role in maintaining familial routines and harmony (Cappellini & Parsons, 2012; DeVault, 1991; Wills et al., 2011). While this research does not examine the mechanisms through which families inculcate eating practices in depth and the gendered dynamics of care, it was observed in the participants' accounts that collective identity of being a family is transmitted through everyday practices such as consumption (Cappellini & Parsons, 2012), and tea time maintains not just temporal but familial order.

4.1.5: Age-graded transition and tacit norms

Several accounts pointed to the beginning of tea time practice as a gradual transition from milk to tea during their teenage years, usually when the homemaker decided that it was appropriate to introduce tea. While it was not be articulated explicitly by the participants, it reflected the presence of tacit norms embedded in everyday life that restrict kids from drinking tea until they are deemed ready, after which the practice is naturally adopted.

> *"At home, we have always had tea. Ever since I can remember, it has been part of our routine. During childhood, I would drink milk in the morning, but by the time I was in school, around age 11 or 12, we had already shifted to drinking tea in the mornings. In the evenings, sometimes it was milk,*

sometimes nothing, but by the time I reached college, tea had become a habit." (P02, 35)

"When I was a kid, we usually used to get milk. A glass of milk and not tea (…). The original flavour of milk is not a very good one, and you usually don't like it (…) so whenever someone is preparing tea, I just used to put my milk into it after they strain the tea and the leaves are there. I add my milk, and it gets some colour from that, and it suddenly becomes more flavourful, and I can easily drink it (…) So this is how I started having tea, the filtered version of it. I think I started it somewhere around grade six or seven (…). Having a glass of milk in the morning and half a cup of tea in the afternoon. As I graduated from the school, I kept the ritual of having a glass of milk in the morning…I think for one more year, and then I started having tea morning and evening" (P03, 29)

In the accounts above, the transition of milk to tea, while not a strict rule, operated as a shared understanding about not serving tea (caffeine) to kids. This moment of shift from milk to tea operated as a symbolic shift, marking the movement from childhood to adulthood. It was initiated as being one among the grown-ups.

The adoption of the practice is an important step in practice performance, which requires slight deliberation, but it is the habituation that makes the practice ordinary and mundane. Since family is the key site for adoption, it was important to note how tea functions as a practice that played a role in maintaining familial harmony.

4.1.6 Conclusion

The section above, along with investigating tea time as a practice, established its significance in the Indian lifestyle; it underscored how practices are organised, produced and sustained and are embedded in the everyday lives of the participants. As the accounts illustrated, tea drinking had become highly automated and habitual.

Practices exist since they are habituated and socially coordinated. However, since tea time as an entity involved a beverage often accompanied by a snack with shared understandings,

evaluating tea time as a performance could shed further light on the set of normative and tacitly affective codes that govern tea time.

As practices are not rigid they exhibit plasticity by reconfiguring the elements that make the practice (Shove et al., 2012). In the case of tea time, while the participants described their routines and regular practices, they also described adapting and modifying the practice when needed. In line with Warde's (2005) elements, the interaction between the procedure, understandings, and engagements could either help achieve stability or disruption of tea time.

The next section looked into the adaptations reflecting the flexibility of tea time and the role of social interaction in reorganising and reproducing the practice.

RQ 2

Social Interactions and Meaning Making

How do shared understandings and social interactions shape the performance of tea time as a social practice?

RQ 4.2 Introduction

In section 4.1, tea time was examined as a practice-as-entity, revealing the structural configuration of its elements. In this section, the focus shifts to tea time performance to investigate how those elements are enacted, negotiated, and varied across situations (Warde, 2016). This distinction between practice-as-entity and practice-as-performance helped highlight the different configurations of elements of tea time that collaborate without losing their overall stability. This examination of tea time performance highlighted the role of social interactions in the reconfiguration of practices, revealing that tea time is socially organised, adjusted, and sustained within everyday socially situated life.

4.2.1 Tea time as a socially organised practice

Halkier (2020) argued that social interaction can introduce reflexivity into the otherwise tacit practice, enabling individuals to adjust and adapt their actions in light of others' expectations. Even if the social interaction is not listed as the main element in a practice, it is the influence of the social interaction that leads to various configuration of the same practice. Participants exhibited how their tea time performance was organised around mundane tacit rules that were socially coordinated, both at work and at home.

Participants sought out others to share tea with, adjusted their timing to align with others' routines, or adapted their own practices to meet social expectations. Tea time emerged as a ritual so banal that it became labelled as a habit, yet it was embedded in for the whole household. As can be seen below

> *"This is the time we take tea around 4.30. We are 4 members over here. My grandmother is also staying with us and there is a caretaker so everyone has a habit of having tea in the evening. We need chai (…) That's a habit and that's out of habit. " (*P02,35)

Participants repeatedly described tea as a socially organised practice that belonged in moments of interaction. Their description reflected the performance of tea time laden with semiotic significance, where the meanings, procedures and emotions varied when the tea

time was enacted in front of others. It functioned as a focal point for social interaction, a moment where family and friends gathered to form social bonds.

The excerpts below highlight how tea time offered opportunities to chat, bond and discuss, establishing tea as a material and social anchor for interactions. As described below:

> *"Basically, if I am having a conversation, then tea is something that I need to be having. So if there are three or four people, then they would be, I mean, we would be wanting something to hold in our hands to sit with. And then tea is the only thing that comes to mind. So it's an element of a conversation for me."* (P06,27)

The participant exhibited the understanding that tea time is not always a solitary activity. They expected tea to be consumed with others, reflecting the inherently social character of practising tea time. Similarly, the excerpt below highlighted tea as the main beverage served along with some food when guests come over.

> *"So normally, it's a part of our culture [researcher name], if somebody comes, we're supposed to be serving them, you know, being kind to them, being, you know, good to them, right!? And tea is accepted as a universal beverage amongst adults, at least in India, right!? (…)So, and then the kind of food that you're serving is also dependent on the time at which the guest is arriving. And secondly, sometimes it's a matter of social purpose also."* (P07, 45)

From a practice theoretical perspective, practices exist through socially shared concepts of their doings and sayings (Dignum, 2018). They are inherently social since they exist through the shared understandings that allow for similar performance across different times, contexts and people (Reckwitz, 2002a).

In both cases above, it is the repetition of these actions that leads to their mundane routinisation, while highlighting the key role of social interactions in guiding the performance of tea time in the everyday lives of the practitioners. These doings and sayings are contested through everyday social interactions, where practices are negotiated, adjusted and adapted.

As a result, practices while being predominantly mundane and routinised, can yet involve moments of reflexive adjustments in their performance with a change in social settings (Neely et al., 2014).

In the following sections, we will examine the different ways social interactions shape the enactment and experience of tea time at home, at work and with guests.

4.2.1a Tea Time as everyday coordination

Social relations are key in governing our eating practices (Delormier et al., 2009). In a household setting, social coordination aligns everyday practices to form familiar socio-temporal rhythms, as routines, preferences, and meanings are adjusted through ongoing interaction (Halkier, 2020; Southerton, 2020).

Participants' accounts supported the theory that social interactions played an important role during tea time. They engaged in performing tea time with others through *adjusting* or *negotiating* their timing, accompaniments, and procedures of tea preparation and consumption, highlighting tea time as a central site for connection, coordination, and relational engagement in daily life. Since tea time operated as a form of everyday consumption activity, it made the processes of these social coordination invisible within domestic life.

The social coordination during tea time was regularly albeit, unreflexively discussed by the participants. As can be seen here in the excerpt, the participant highlighted how tea time is part of their socialisation and how it changed upon moving in with their partner:

> *"I don't like having tea alone. And this is how I met my wife. When we started…when we became friends….umm…both of us found that we are passionate about tea, making tea and having it as a ritual, and this is something that has given us our quiet time. And this special occasion because it's something that occurs every day. (…)My wife has influenced my taste in tea. Before meeting my wife, I used to drink tea just with milk and sugar, which was dense and sweet. It was more like a dessert for me. But when I met my wife, I saw that her tea was very different from mine, where she used to boil the tea leaves in the water and then add ginger and milk. It*

is more watery and has less sugar, and now my idea of drinking tea has shifted. Initially, it was a half cup of sweet, dense tea that was meant to give a sugar rush, but now I take my time with the tea. It is a full cup of watery tea that I can have for over 10-15 mins, and that gives me relaxation time with my wife" (P03, 29)

The participant associated tea time as a time to enjoy moments of bonding with their partner. They reconfigured their tea time through domestic coordination with their partner's practice. Although not mentioned as a deliberation, the gradual alignment to the partner's tea style involved a shift in *procedure* (adding more water, less sugar), *engagement* (spending relaxed time with the partner) and *understanding* (tea is not just a dessert). Such *adjustments* reflected the evolution of practices through co-performance in shared living arrangements.

Similarly, the participant's partner highlighted how they coordinated their tea time practice with the partner through building new understandings of doing the tea time.

"And generally I, when I used to have it with my parents at my hometown, it would be …so you have these savouries called mathri. So, I would enjoy that a lot with tea. But then Akshay introduced me to…. You know this biscuit - Farm Light biscuit. I think roughly 4-5 years ago. So now, at least in the morning when we are having tea, we have one biscuit with tea" (P04, 31)

Within households, tea time was coordinated through mutual adjustment and gradual alignment to forming familiar domestic rhythm. The change in living situation created the site for reconfiguration of their tea time practices, which were already stabilised through repetition at their parents' home. These adaptations were visible in the material arrangements, accompaniments, and meanings attached to tea time, as both practitioners negotiated elements of their existing practices to perform tea time together.

Similarly, in the excerpt below, the participant distinguished her Sunday tea time through the adjusted *engagement* she had with tea in the presence of her husband. She anticipated her husband preparing tea as a moment of shared bonding ritual where the change in practice was carried out as social coordination.

> *"I feel like morning tea and love are the same. Just like love gives you newness and freshness, tea does the same. Like, I wait eagerly for Sunday. I look forward to it. My husband is an advocate. He goes to work daily, but on Sundays, he has a holiday, so I look forward to Sunday at 4:00 PM because on Sunday, my husband makes the tea for me. I don't make it myself that day, on Sunday, I look forward to drinking tea made by him."* (P11, 64)

These accounts demonstrated that tea time is not merely a personal choice but a socially co-performed practice, shaped through everyday interactions, mutual adjustments, and negotiated rhythms. These adaptations/negotiations/adjustments reconfigured tea time's material arrangements, procedures, and meanings confirming the role of social coordination in shaping the enactment of tea time.

These reconfigurations are embedded in the maintenance of domestic rhythm, which is formed due to *the rearrangement and reproduction of practices* (Shove et al., 2012). The adaptations demonstrated above also confirmed the flexibility of tea time to be able to adjust, modify and adapt but still retain its identity as a recognisable practice. The newly coordinated forms of tea time over time become stabilised through repetition, supporting the idea that food practices in a family are sustained through collaborative modification.

Since social coordination is shaped by the presence of other practitioners, apart from the adaptations at home, tea time was also socially coordinated at the workplace, which will be illustrated below.

4.2.1b Social Coordination of Tea Time at Work

For participants engaged in paid work, tea time extended beyond the domestic sphere and became embedded within organisational routines. In workplace settings, aligning one's tea time with those of colleagues functioned as a way of participating in shared routines and signalling professional belonging.

As one participant noted:

> *"So, I have worked in different workplaces, and what I've experienced is that, most commonly, during work, when we need a break or want to connect to*

> *discuss something important, tea naturally becomes part of that moment. (…) We used to have back-to-back sessions and then the place of tea where we used to have it, it was also a way to relax not in terms of the requirement of the body related to tea consumption but this was a good way to socialize, to interact with each other and to discuss some important elements related to cases and we used to meet our seniors and professors at that particular point so it was a good way to socialize as well."* (P13, 48)

The excerpt illustrated that tea time at the workplace operated as a socially coordinated, structured break that enabled interaction and sustained workplace relationships. Participants described learning when and where tea was consumed by observing others and attuning themselves to existing office rhythms, highlighting how workplace tea time was governed by shared understandings of tacit rules of sociability and collegial participation.

Even participants who described themselves as disciplined in their personal routines reported adjusting their tea consumption in response to invitations from colleagues, reflecting the normative expectation to join shared breaks. Entering a new workplace involved aligning with established official routines: joining colleagues during tea breaks, participating in informal gatherings, and gradually incorporating these practices into one's professional life. Such processes reflected organisational socialisation, through which individuals reduce uncertainty and negotiate their position within the professional order (Nicolini, 2012; Van Maanen & Schein, 1977).

Thus, in both domestic and workplace setting tea time was performed to convey or display social meanings, demonstrating how eating and drinking practices are shaped not just by individual choice but by shared understandings of appropriateness and belonging (Warde, 2005).

The next section explores how tea time practices are adjusted when guests are present, revealing how shared expectations and moral evaluations guide the performance of hospitality. In the Indian context, such adaptations highlight the centrality of food in expressing care, respect, and social belonging.

4.2.1c Guests and the Reconfiguration of Tea Time

Social interaction exerts substantial influence on the resources, time and competencies required to perform eating practices. (Halkier, 2016; Shove et al., 2012; Southerton, 2013; Spaargaren, Weenink, et al., 2016). Even well-established practices may be compelled to reconfigure their shape under the effect of social interactions. Similarly, in the case of tea time, social interactions extended their meaning beyond consumption to position it as a site to facilitate bonding, conversation, and shared exchange.

Tea time emerged as a socially organised practice that operated across multiple domains of everyday life, with its form and meaning shaped by the social setting in which it is performed. Social coordination structured tea time routines in domestic and workplace settings, additionally participants' accounts indicated additional adaptations when tea was shared with guests. The presence of non-routine others (guests) prompted reconfigurations that signalled hospitality, care, and cultural expectations.

In setting where the guest was present, the social coordination of tea time involved negotiating what is served along with tea. While the participants associated the routine tea time coordination with achieving stability and comfort, in the presence of an external guest, tea time changed its identity. Accompaniments with tea, which were peripheral in accounts of solitary tea time practices, became central when tea was shared with guests. Tea, thus transformed its meaning from a private moment of relaxation to a social performance of care, hospitality and indulgence.

> *"If guests are coming over, I need to be careful about what I serve. At my in-laws' place, I have noticed that during festivals, the spread is much more elaborate. Along with tea, there will be namkeen, mathri, fruits, and at least one sweet item. On such occasions, the expectation is to be more lavish, especially if the visit has been prearranged. In contrast, if someone drops in unexpectedly, then whatever is available at home is served quickly. The difference lies in whether the visit is planned or spontaneous - planned visits call for variety and display, while unplanned visits allow for simplicity."* (P04, 31)

In the above excerpt, the participant described how the presence of a guest transformed tea time from a routine act into a performance of hospitality. The social norms and expectations governed what the tea time spread should reflect care about the arrival of guests and serve several items as an offering. There was a cultural justification provided for the reflexive reconfiguration and adaptation of the practice to reflect the perceived significance of the occasion and the guest as will be seen in the next section.

4.2.3 Cultural Norms and Social Expectations around Hospitality

Participants' accounts indicated that social norms around hospitality played a significant role in shaping modification/adaptations of tea time. In the presence of a guest, tea took a supporting role while the accompaniments – the snacks, sweets and savouries that were served became the key elements that conveyed the meaning and social signal that hosts wanted to exhibit in the presence of external guests during tea time. [6] Participants described these adjustments as guided by a culturally familiar idea of '*atithi Devo bhava'* (the guest is akin to God). As one participant noted:

> *"There are certain expectations that we should be serving something with tea because otherwise it would not look nice on our part to not give anything or to not host our guests properly. And now it has become such an intrinsic part of a routine. That I can't now distinguish whether it is an expectation? Always because everything I have seen somebody coming over, we have been serving something with the tea. Its become such an its an ingrained part of our lifestyles now. "* (P05, 29)

> *"I feel that when someone visits, they don't really come for the food. But as a gesture of respect, we make sure to place a few items in front of them. If they eat, that's good; if they don't, that's also fine. (…) Still, whenever*

[6] While these spreads aren't limited to tea time and the lavish hospitality is quite central to Indian cultural practice, my interviews only focused on the arrival of guests during tea time. It is therefore important to note that guests may also come at other times, and the sharing of food, regardless of its form, will mostly be accompanied by tea unless explicitly requested otherwise.

someone does come home, I try to prepare a few things as a sign of respect."
(P11, 64)

These accounts illustrated the socially shared scripts of hospitality that were displayed during tea time by the participants. The presence of a guest prompted a reconfiguration of tea-time arrangements, not merely in terms of quantity but in relation to what was considered appropriate, respectable, and socially expected.

From a practice theoretical perspective, the display of accompaniments was understood as the nexus of *understandings, procedures* and *engagements*. The materials, like the snacks, the utensils and the presentation, enabled the enactment of the hospitality that displayed the embodied *understandings* of arranging timings and serving these items appropriately. The embodied *competence* regarding what is to be served to which guests and under what circumstances were operated through practical intelligibility. It fed into the *engagements* that the hosts want to take part in, including maintenance of social relations and demonstrations of being 'proper' host.

Hosting guests required mindful adjustments, demonstrating how tea-time practices were organised, adapted, and sustained within socially situated contexts. In such instances, routine tea time practices were modified through changes in materials, competences, and meanings, with tea itself remaining secondary to the broader arrangement of accompaniments. These variations highlighted how tea time, while generally routinised, became a site where the socially accepted expectations and relational considerations reconfigured its performance.

4.2.4 Conclusion

Although participants initially framed their tea time practices as mundane and automatic, further reflection revealed the shared understandings and social coordination in sustaining these practices in different settings. Participants reconfigured their tea time based on social contexts and the outcomes they sought (hospitality, togetherness, or personal routine). They adapted their practices when there were changes in living situation, workplace or daily routine and gradually routinised them. This simply means that while practices are automatic and taken for granted, when there is a change in the setting, the practitioners adjust/adapt

the practice. These adaptations are part of the discursive modes that get activated in the need to sustain practice.

In terms of a practice-theoretical framework, these discursive modes revealed the '*practical intelligibility*' (Schatzki, 2010) that helps practitioners to adapt and perform tea time. The *practical intelligibility* justifies the practitioners as not just tacit, non-discursive human agents but knowledgeable and capable agents (Schatzki, 2010; Spaargaren, Weenink, et al., 2016) who shifted their understandings (from personal enjoyment to performing care and respect), procedures (expanded to include the preparation of specific accompaniments), and engagements (involved careful attention to timing, company, and hosting rituals) to perform tea time in different contexts.

Therefore, performance of tea time demanded that practitioners oriented themselves to their environments and adjusted their doings and sayings to adhere to social norms. In other words, tea time was sustained through not just through repetition but also through relationality and social order.

RQ 3

Health and Embodied Know How

RQ 3: How are health rationalities incorporated into tea-time practices in ways that allow them to accommodate health concerns while remaining routinised and socially meaningful?

RQ 4.3 Introduction

In section 4.2, it was seen that practices while stabilised through repetition and reproduction also go through adaptations or modifications throughout their life course. Reckwitz (2002) emphasised that continuity in practice is performed because of embodied know-how and practical understandings, while Shove (2012) argued that practices endure because they are flexibly reconfigured rather than rigidly reproduced. Thus, practices can remain recognisable not by resisting change but selectively absorbing it.

This next section examined the reconfigurations in practices that allowed participants to accommodate emerging concerns of health. It observed how health functioned as an internalised logic that adjusted or adapted the everyday routine performance of tea time. This section moved beyond the established practice-theoretical insight that practices can adapt, instead it answers under what conditions are health rationalities incorporated into everyday food practices without destabilising them?

4.3.1 Health as Embodied Know-how

Tea time endured by integrating new **understandings** into familiar **procedures**, allowing participants to sustain their sense of self and household order. In this sense, tea time demonstrated how practices remain **dynamic yet stable** where health related knowledge were not external guidelines but absorbed into existing structures of tea time.

Although health was not a direct focus of the interview guide, participants frequently introduced health-related adaptations when describing their tea time routines. The volunteered information suggested that such considerations are integral to the routine performance of tea time.

These health-related adaptations revealed how health discourses are taken up, translated, and enacted as embodied know-how during tea time. Rather than being followed as explicit rules, health discourses were incorporated through sensory judgement, habitual regulation, and practical adjustment. In this way, health entered tea-time practices not as an overriding objective, but as a background sensibility shaping how the practice was performed.

4.3.2 Seasonality and Contextual Disruptions

Seasonal changes were a socially understood and culturally intelligible context that modified tea time. It influenced the materials used and the preparation of tea, reflecting both health considerations and sensory preferences. For example, participants added warming ingredients such as ginger, anise, cinnamon, or tulsi leaves during colder months to provide comfort and support perceived health benefits:

> "*So yes, there was this time, specifically during winters, I had this habit of having a good amount of tea, which is ginger tea. I have a specific preference for ginger tea. If ginger tea is there, I won't prefer anything else. I don't like anything else. So, tea means ginger tea."* (P13, 48)

Similarly, (P07, 45) noted:

> *"Right. So sometimes there's ginger in winters, or some… say my sister likes ginger tea. So if I'm having my tea with her, the first cup would be a ginger tea. OK. Hmm. Then anise is there. Mm-hmm. Uh. What else do we put? Sometimes, Cinnamon, again, depending on the weather. Cold weather, basically. Not these days. Yeah. Yeah. And tulsi leaves, basically. But I generally prefer to have plain tea, OK."* (P07, 45)

Disruptions revealed the resilience of the tea time. The seasonal adjustments demonstrated how tea drinking was both flexible and embodied: while the core practice of boiling milk, water, tea, and sugar remained the socially recognised baseline, participants adapted the procedure by adding or substituting ingredients to align with comfort, health, and context. This reflected Halkier's (2022) concept of mundane normativity - 'the socially acceptable way of performing a practice', while allowing room for individual and situational variation.

By integrating seasonal knowledge, tea drinking remained socially embedded, spatiotemporally bound, and adaptable. It illustrated how participants' embodied health know-how was negotiated in the routine and health-conscious adjustments.

4.3.2 Acidity and Gastric Discomfort related adaptations

Acidity was described as a common concern among the participants. Most of the participants modified their procedures to continue their tea drinking. They backed up the new procedures either through medical advice or self-modification based on embodied experience. As can be seen in the excerpt below:

> *"I don't drink tea all by itself because at times I feel that it is acidic. I like my tea very, very light. It is not very heavy on milk, and I don't over-boil my tea, which again I feel the tea which is over-boiled with milk tends to be more acidic. I don't get up and have the tea immediately on an empty stomach. I never do that. So it is usually after breakfast or along with it. My parents they drink tea first thing in the morning. They want tea"* (P14, 41)

Embodied *understandings* of what rendered tea difficult to digest shifted the *procedures* of the participant. The participant adjusted the timing, preparation and composition of tea rather than abandoning the practice. The adaptation not only signalled an orientation towards bodily care, but it also distinguished the practice from the inherited practice.

Health operated not as an external intervention but as an internalised logic that subtly reshaped routine. As drinking tea on an empty stomach was perceived as harmful, participants adapted their practice through preventive measures, as can be seen below:

> *"I had a gastric problem, and a doctor suggested that. Drinking tea. An empty stomach can cause me to have gas. So from that day onwards, I think it's been three years. I never drink tea. Alone. I have either biscuit, half roti or anything else, a certain thing."* (P03, 29)

> *"About seven or eight years ago, I never ate anything with my morning tea, but someone once told me that drinking tea on an empty stomach isn't good. Since then, I've always had a small bite with it, and that habit has continued."* (P04, 31)

Across participants, there was a shared *understanding* that drinking tea on an empty stomach could cause discomfort. Embodied discomfort acted as the practical signal that guided the

adaptation to preserve tea time. In both of the above cases, the decision to consume an accompaniment with tea was framed as a preventive health adaptation. However, none of them quit the practice due to the gastric discomfort; they stabilised their practice by adaptations like the ones mentioned above.

While this heightened reflexivity may partly be the result of the interview process, the accounts nonetheless demonstrated the plasticity of everyday practices. Tea time persisted despite bodily discomfort through embodied health-based adaptations that preserved its ongoing performance.

4.3.3 Health logics as moral discipline

Some participants had pre-empted the issues that could arise because of tea (as a sweetened beverage) and had taken preventative measures either on themselves or through observing their parents do the same. Their adaptations were framed as not just as adjustments but expressions of self-discipline and responsibility. The preventative norms that guided the practice reflected everyday eating governed through health concerns.

Sugar reduction emerged as one such concern, especially among participants with a family history of diabetes. Drinking tea without sugar, or consuming sugar-free biscuits, was frequently described not simply as a taste preference but as an act of care for oneself and one's family.

Health norms were enacted pre-emptively, shaping everyday choices even in the absence of diagnosed conditions. Participant, (P08, 62) was mindful of not eating biscuits with high sugar content since they were worried about diabetes, as it ran in their family. They explained how their choice of tea accompaniments was guided by concerns of health and family history. When asked if they consumed biscuits every day, they replied:

> *"Yes, I have them every day - but only sugar-free ones. I am getting older, and since both my parents had diabetes, I want to prevent it. My sugar levels are normal now, but I take these sugar-free biscuits with tea as a precaution. If I eat sugar, then I will also get diabetes."* (P08, 62)

Another participant introduced the practice of not taking sugar in her family as a preventative measure against diabetes, which their mother struggled with.

> *"When I was around eight or nine years old, my mother was diagnosed with diabetes. I remember seeing her drink tea with sugar, and somewhere in my mind, I decided that if I never added sugar to my tea, I would never get diabetes. That thought has stayed with me since childhood. Even now, I don't take sugar in tea or milk. I have four daughters, and none of them takes sugar in milk either - perhaps they take it in tea sometimes, but not in milk. It has become a habit passed down from childhood."* (P11, 64)

They explained how their mother's diagnosis of diabetes led to a household-wide shift to sugar-free tea, a practice that was subsequently transmitted to their daughters. This act of drinking tea without sugar not only operated as a familial precaution but also signalled the morality of self-discipline. By choosing a sugar-free biscuit, the participant made a preventative health choice, converting a normal ritual into an act of health and care.

These narratives did not frame tea time as problematic but rather adjusted the procedures to inculcate the health concerns.

Many participants were keen on reflecting their alignment with being healthy as a lifestyle and illustrated how even a seemingly routine practice of eating biscuits with evening tea was moralised through health. For example

> *"In terms of accompaniments, no, I don't actually, because I've left sugar completely, so no biscuits, nothing of that sort. So once in a while, only if I see something has been kept along with the tea and if somebody is over right when some guests are over, then I do pick up again. But that is rare, very rare. "* (P05, 29)

Here, the participant and her interaction with the material have another meaning, and that is why she does not take anything with the tea, and she maintains her identity of being healthy by not drinking sugar and not taking snacks with the tea.

4.3.4 Health-related Collective Convenience and Coordination

Health-related modifications to tea time were further stabilised through collective routines and shared competence within households. Tea preparation in Indian homes is typically a collective practice where one person typically prepared tea for all, balancing ingredients and quantities to satisfy shared expectations. Therefore, convenience and practicality also normalised health-related modifications by embedding them into household routines.

One participant described how their practice started

> *"I didn't drink tea in childhood; I started only after I began working. Since it was difficult to prepare separate cups with and without sugar, I simply joined them in having sugar-free tea, and I liked it that way. So, for me, it wasn't about health concerns or heredity; it just came naturally and stayed as a habit."* (P07, 45)

The framing of this modification was not through health reasoning but rather convenience. Preparing Indian tea is a time-intensive, procedural task, involving multiple steps, requiring attention to proportions of milk, water, tea leaves, and sugar. The family's adaptation to a collective sugar-free routine revealed the collective nature of tea-making in Indian households.

Since convenience was an important determinant for collective tea drinking in case of an individual's change in practice due to illness, preventive health concerns, or preference, it could indirectly reshape the routines of others who share the practice. The practice might stay intact for one not engaging in the preparation; however, the one who is preparing the tea often entails adjusting materials or competencies, such as sugar substitution or altered proportions. In this case, the competence of tea preparation and the convenience of shared making reinforced continuity, while the participant's deliberate yet inherited choice shows how agency, habit, and context intersect in sustaining everyday food practices. Health concerns did not fragment routines or individualise consumption; instead, they were coordinated into collective rhythms that preserved sociability and everyday normalcy.

These adjustments illustrate how health concerns are absorbed into existing practices rather than prompting radical change. The meaning of tea time as a necessary, taken-for-granted part of daily life remains intact, even as its material composition evolves. External disruptions do not dismantle tea time but expose its capacity for absorption and reconfiguration.

4.3.5 Abandonment of Practice

Abandonment occurred only when embodied meaning that sustained the practice collapsed. Tea making and drinking emerged as a collective ritual and an act of self-care, performed within material and temporal constraints that sustain its social embeddedness. The small, routinised activities were deeply anchored in everyday life, making them resistant to changes unless a fundamental transformation was recorded in the sensory experience and affective association.

One participant, who expressed a strong attachment to tea, described giving up completely following a severe health condition.

> *"However, a year ago, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. After my operation and chemotherapy, I developed severe nausea and vomiting from tea. Since then, I've stopped drinking it completely. Even the smell now makes me sick. My health has recovered, but I still can't stand tea - it feels as though I've developed an allergy. I sometimes drink warm water with ginger, cardamom, and cloves instead. Tea used to be a part of me, but now it feels distant."* (P11,64)

In this case, tea induced nausea and aversion during chemotherapy leading to the associative emotions of disgust and pain. The participants embodied pleasure and familiarity that supported the practice were replaced and hence the practice crumbled. Although they continued serving tea to other, they abandoned the practice since it was reminiscent of the hard times during the chemotherapy and the nausea induced disgust.

This account demonstrated how the elements of practice can dismantle in some situation through affective emotions. As seen here, the once routinised practice was disrupted by the illness that replaced the emotions of care, routine and pleasure with those of nausea and

aversion. The meaning that had held the practice together was the one that disrupted the practice since it did not mean the same to them anymore.

Tea time ceased not because health rationalities intensified, but because the practice no longer carried the meanings care, comfort, pleasure that had previously sustained it.

4.3.8 Conclusion

These adjustments illustrated how health concerns are absorbed into existing practices rather than prompting radical change. The meaning of tea time as a necessary, taken-for-granted part of daily life remained intact, even as its material composition evolved. External disruptions did not dismantle tea time but rather exposed its capacity for absorption and reconfiguration.

Across interviews, participants frequently articulated concerns related to acidity, gastric discomfort, sugar consumption, and bodily suitability. However, rather than discontinuing tea time, participants modified how the practice was performed. The modifications of practices demonstrate practice-theoretical arguments that embodied understanding allows participants to adapt to new circumstances. The practice persists through flexible reconfiguration rather than abandonment (Reckwitz, 2002b; Shove et al., 2012).

Tea time remained recognised as a moment of pause and refreshment, even as ingredients or quantities were adjusted in response to health advice, ageing, or bodily discomfort. So while tea time was being performed routinely, examining these negotiations explained the resilience of the practice. The conscious trade-offs practitioners made to fit in their unique ideas around convenience, health, and cultural identity gave room for the practitioners to make the practice their own. So even if the ritual persists due to shared understandings, procedures and engagements, the shape could evolve in response to social, personal, and health considerations.

The analysis demonstrated that health-related adjustments rarely lead to the abandonment of tea time; instead, through subtle reconfigurations of materials, procedures, and competences, the practice remained recognisable while accommodating emerging health concerns.

Importantly, health did not operate as an external corrective force but rather as an internalised sensibility embedded in timing, restraint, substitution, and collective coordination. Overall, the analysis demonstrated that tea time endured because its resilience lies in its capacity to absorb health concerns while remaining recognisable, meaningful, and socially embedded.

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Discussion

Chapter 5. Discussion

In this chapter, I provide a brief overview of my research findings and discuss the importance of tea time as an everyday food practice. In the first part of this chapter, I summarise the main findings of the thesis. The second part of the chapter discusses the limitations of the research. The third part highlights the contributions of the thesis. Finally, I return to the implications and outline the broader significance of the study.

5.1 Summary of the findings

This thesis framed tea time as an analytically significant everyday practice through which daily life is temporally and socially organised. It was brought forth as not just a habitual consumption but a routinised practice that shaped the broader temporal and social rhythms of daily life. By examining this context-specific, regularised eating practice analytically, I demonstrated that everyday food practices are not always the sites of conscious decision-making. They are mundane yet dynamic and are sustained through repetition, familiarity, and shared understandings.

In this thesis, tea time is conceptualised as a culturally significant practice as it is a routinised, socially shared, and normatively organised activity that is performed at recognisable times of the day, embedded within broader constellations of everyday practices, and sustained through taken-for-granted understandings of what is appropriate, expected, and meaningful. The findings were grounded in the accounts of middle-class participants without intending to be statistically representative, it provided an interpretive snapshot of how tea-time is experienced, narrated, and reproduced across diverse age and gender groups.

The first research question examined how tea time is enacted as part of everyday temporal organisation. The findings revealed that tea drinking at particular times during the day played an important role in routine management and supporting the coordination of everyday activity. Tea time was the time stamp that helped practitioners punctuate their day and mark transitions between periods of work, rest, and leisure. The practitioners narrated their tea time as a largely casual and automatic activity that was an indispensable part of everyday functioning. This taken-for-granted activity was neither explicitly planned nor reflected upon;

it was embedded within familiar daily rhythms and learned through repeated exposure over time. Since tea time was performed at recognisable times, with similar understandings about its importance and utilisation during the day, it was rarely questioned.

Tea time and its associated practices were governed by the shared understandings that managed the everyday tempo. Morning tea was understood to be the stimulant that energises and prepares you for the day ahead, while evening tea was the cue to start winding down. The tea time routines contributed to the sense of order and continuity, reducing the cognitive load required in everyday functioning of life. The findings demonstrated that, similar to routine eating practices, tea time operated not merely as an individual habit, but as temporally organised anchors that structured daily life. It was adopted and adjusted according to individual needs, while persisting as a stable entity structured by shared and recognisable understandings, procedures and engagements within society.

The second research question focused on the role of social interaction in performing the tea time. By directing attention to an otherwise mundane routine, the research process prompted practitioners to reflect on aspects of tea time that are typically performed without conscious deliberation. Variations in practitioners' tea time emerged in contexts where social relations were situated. Therefore, the second part of the results revealed shifts within recognisable tea time practices governed by social expectations and articulated through embodied reflexivity. Tea time was revealed as a practice that had collective understandings of socially performed appropriateness, hospitality, and care. These shared understandings provided a framework within which individual performances of tea time were able to transform and remain legitimate and intelligible.

Practitioners consistently coordinated their tea time with others. They adjusted their timings, accompaniments, and meanings they assigned to the tea time in order to perform the practice in different social settings. These ongoing coordination and adjustment revealed the key role of social interactions at tea time. It helped to sustain the practice through active negotiation and adaptation rather than abandonment. Accompaniments played a particularly significant role in this process. Decisions regarding what to consume alongside tea, whom to offer it to, and how to accommodate differing preferences were actively negotiated in social contexts. Offering drinks and food to guests is not merely a gesture of welcome but also a deeply rooted

idea of '*atithi Devo bhava'* - the guest is akin to God. This expression encapsulates the cultural ideal that structures hospitality practices across India. These social expectations surrounding tea time strongly point to socially coordinated performance that involved shifting the understandings, procedures and engagements that reconfigured tea time without losing its core identity.

The third research question examined tea time as a site of health and moral evaluation and negotiations. Analysing tea time both as a structured practice entity and as an enacted performance was therefore instrumental in capturing its dynamic and contested nature. The findings indicated that everyday eating practices, such as tea time, are also the sites where concerns about health and bodily care were continuously adjusted and negotiated. Most of the practitioners expressed awareness of tea time as a moment associated with the consumption of sugars, fats, and salts. They frequently framed their health consciousness and attentiveness to healthy living through adjustments in their practice. As tea time was seen as part of the food culture, practitioners adjusted accompaniments, quantities, and frequency to reconcile health concerns with established routines and prevailing social expectations.

Participants hesitated to explicitly articulate norms governing tea time; they nonetheless navigated health concerns during tea time through practical understandings of balance, timing, and situational appropriateness. These similar understandings around health point to the presence of health-related embodied knowledge that was actively negotiated. Importantly, the findings suggest that the existence of health concerns did not readily lead to abandonment of tea time. Instead, changing or giving up an established practice required considerable deliberation. Therefore, health considerations were accommodated through incremental adjustments that allowed sustaining routines while aligning their performances with emerging health norms.

In conclusion, this thesis showed that every day is an important site to analyse and investigate the consumption practices. It demonstrated investigating everyday mundane practice such as eating as a socially embedded activity, shaped by routines, relationships, and moral considerations rather than individual rational choice alone. These findings also signal that tea time is not a nutritionally insignificant or socially trivial eating occasion, but a key site through which the organisation and reproduction of practice can be studied. By making tea time

analytically visible, this thesis extends sociological understandings of everyday consumption beyond meals and shows how ordinary eating occasions play a central role in shaping everyday life. In doing so, it opens new possibilities for thinking about everyday food practices as relevant sites for understanding health, care, and social organisation in contemporary urban India. The study has certain limitations, which will be discussed in the next section.

5.2 Potential Limitations of the Overall Study

In this section, I discuss the limitations of the current study, specifically those related to the methods of data production employed and the participant group included in the analysis.

As outlined in the methodology chapter, this study relied on in-depth interviews to investigate tea time. While the interviews produced detailed accounts of how tea time is organised, experienced, and negotiated in daily life, this choice also had certain limitations. This methodology relies on narratives of the practitioners, rather than direct observations or real-time documentation of what participants consume during tea time in situ.

While interviews provided construction of information through participants' reflections on their social expectations, moral considerations, and routine arrangements surrounding tea time, these reflections were articulated in response to the researcher. Direct observations, ethnography or detailed food diaries may have enabled a more critical analysis of consumption patterns, but they were not necessary to address the core research questions concerning the social organisation, temporal structuring, and moral dimensions of tea-time practices. They can be influenced to discuss the aspects and concerns which they believe are meaningful and noteworthy to the researcher, leaving other taken-for-granted elements that are not articulated.

These limitations were acknowledged from the outset of the study and were addressed through careful questionnaire design and research efforts to avoid influencing participants' responses or suggesting connections between the research and health issues. These precautions ensure that the study's analytical focus remains robust.

A second potential limitation was the composition of the participant group. The study focused on urban middle-class participants, which might have limited the extent to which the findings

could be generalised across socio-economic groups or rural contexts. Everyday food practices, including tea-time routines, are shaped by access to resources, work arrangements, and domestic infrastructures, all of which vary across social locations. However, the findings presented in this thesis should not be read as representative of tea-time practices in India.

Nevertheless, there are several reasons why the analytical relevance of the findings extends beyond the specific participant group studied. First, the focus of the thesis is not on documenting the prevalence of particular tea time foods or routines, but on identifying the social and practical logics through which tea time is organised and sustained. The analysis highlights how tea time operates as a stabilising routine, a site of negotiation, that is not unique to a single social group, even if they take different forms in other contexts.

Second, while the participant group is socially delimited, the study attends to variation within this group. Participants differed in household composition, work arrangements, gendered responsibilities, and health concerns, allowing the analysis to capture how tea-time practices are adapted across differing everyday circumstances. This variation enables the identification of patterns in how tea time is maintained, adjusted, or experienced differently, rather than producing a singular or homogeneous account. The elements of a practice are dynamic and can move, change, or adapt, leading to a change in the practice (Dobernig et al., 2016). Such changes are difficult to assess scientifically because the reasons for these changes vary from person to person. As health discourses become increasingly individualised, recognising that people modify, abandon, or maintain practices for diverse reasons is crucial. It might be good information to know that people have different reasons why they change a practice, modify or abandon it. These changes are not always driven by individual motivation or intentionality; often, they occur because contextual circumstances demand a particular way of performing. In such cases, it is the context, rather than conscious decision-making, that shapes performance. Participants also modified their procedures to adjust for the health concerns, rather than their elimination.

Finally, the concepts and analytical distinctions developed in the thesis, such as tea time as a temporal anchor, a socially coordinated routine, and a site of moral negotiation, are not bound to specific demographic characteristics. Instead, they offer a framework for examining

everyday eating occasions more broadly. As such, the findings are analytically transferable, even if they are not statistically generalisable.

Using practice theory, it was analysed both as a structured entity and as an enacted performance, highlighting its stability, dynamism and socially coordinated nature. The routinisation of the tea time provides insight into the mundane norms about eating that are sustained through repetition, while still open to negotiation and adaptation during everyday life. The empirical analysis method of this thesis is based on in-depth semi-structured interviews examining tea time practices among urban middle-class households in India.

Taken together, while the study has clear methodological and empirical boundaries, these limitations are consistent with its qualitative, practice-theoretical orientation. The choices made regarding methods and participant selection enabled an in-depth examination of an under-researched everyday eating practice and generated insights into the social organisation of tea time that would have been difficult to capture through other approaches.

5.3 Contributions to the Empirical Field

In this section, I outline the contributions of the dissertation to both the empirical field of sociological food studies and to theories of practice. Empirically, the dissertation contributes by highlighting tea time as a distinct yet underexplored site of everyday consumption. By centring tea time, the dissertation brings into analytical focus a mundane eating occasion that is neither nutritionally insignificant nor socially neutral, yet often escapes both scholarly and policy attention.

Across the empirical chapters, the analysis shows that tea time is sustained through shared understandings of appropriateness, expected accompaniments, and situational norms, which remain open to adaptation. In response to changing life circumstances such as shifts in household composition, work routines, health concerns, or exposure to new social environments routine food practices are reproduced through incremental adjustments that preserve recognizability while allowing flexibility.

The dissertation further contributes to the empirical field by demonstrating how tea-time eating operates as a site of sociality and distinction. Tea-time snacks function not only as

consumable items but also as social signals of care, hospitality, restraint, indulgence, or moral responsibility.

Since social interactions induces change in tea time performance, the shared understandings of hospitality are key to understand the social obligation that exists in a society. Most participants described serving more or special items to signal hospitality in presence of an external guest. They also signalled the addition of convenience food in their daily lives. So even if the notion of outside food is unhealthy, the convenience food has seeped into everyday life. This observation resonates with Halkier's (2017) discussion of socially expectable forms of consumption, where the organisation of everyday practices is shaped by norms and the meaning attached to them. Through participants' accounts, the analysis shows how taste preferences, snack choices, and modes of serving are entangled with middle-class identities, moral evaluations of food, and health concerns, without these being articulated in explicitly nutritional or biomedical terms.

While public health approaches often focus on 'dietary behaviours' as discrete, rational choices, Practice Theory critiques this framing, arguing that such models underestimate the structural, cultural, and habitual dimensions of eating (Olstad & Kirkpatrick, 2021). Interventions that presume consumers will make better choices when better informed often overlook the social routines and symbolic meanings that sustain certain eating practices.

5.4 Implications for Policy and Change Initiatives

In this section, I discuss the implications of the dissertation for policy and change initiatives concerned with diet-related health outcomes, including obesity and non-communicable diseases. While the dissertation does not set out to evaluate specific interventions, the findings offer important insights into how everyday eating practices are organised and, consequently, how they might be reshaped.

A central goal of the dissertation is to demonstrate that everyday eating practices such as tea time cannot be effectively addressed through approaches that focus solely on individual choice, nutritional knowledge, or willpower. The findings show that tea time is embedded within routinised temporal structures, shared social expectations, and moral evaluations of

appropriateness. As such, attempts to influence eating policies must engage with the practice as a whole rather than targeting isolated food items or individual behaviours.

Rather than framing unstructured eating as discretionary or trivial, policies could acknowledge their regularity and cultural significance, and work towards supporting alternative snack repertoires that align with existing understandings of convenience, taste, and social acceptability.

Second, the findings indicate that social norms and expectations play a crucial role in sustaining tea time practices. This implies that interventions aimed at reshaping eating habits may be more effective if they work through collective settings, such as workplaces, schools, or community spaces, where shared routines and expectations are formed and reinforced. Supporting socially acceptable alternatives, rather than prescribing idealised dietary behaviours, may reduce the practical and social effort required for change.

Third, the dissertation highlights that tea time is closely linked to broader rhythms of everyday life, including work schedules, caregiving responsibilities, and leisure practices. This suggests that policy initiatives concerned with dietary health should consider how food practices interlock with time pressures and material arrangements. For instance, workplace food environments and institutional schedules may significantly shape what kinds of tea-time eating practices are possible or likely.

The findings point towards the value of practice-oriented policy approaches that seek to reconfigure everyday food practices by reshaping the conditions under which they are performed. By attending to routines, social expectations, and material arrangements, such approaches may be better equipped to support gradual, sustainable changes in everyday eating practices.

5. Future significance and theoretical trajectory

Tea time not only reflected hospitality and care but also illustrated how convenience foods have become socially expected and accepted within everyday routines. Even when such items are perceived as less wholesome, their integration into tea time highlighted the ways in which changing consumption patterns are normalised through social practice. The consistent presence of convenience foods across participants' signals that future work can explore how

convenience food seeps into everyday life and affects the cultural norms of hospitality, care, and social coordination.

Annex:

1. Gendered dynamics

Furthermore accounts also underscores the gendered dynamics of domestic food practices, where women's family feeding practices often structure the organisation and continuity of household routine (DeVault, 1991). As can be evidenced from another interview excerpt of a recently retired man who is now adapting to the new routine of daily life structure, He believes he has picked up the routine of drinking tea from his wife:

> *"I did not drink tea in my village, but it was only after my marriage that I developed this habit. My wife used to drink tea, and then I started having it with her."*

All of the men interviewed described a similar pattern of aligning their tea time practices with those of their partner or mother, as a way of maintaining balance in the coordination of everyday household activities. In families where members perform distinct roles and follow varied schedules, such alignment helps facilitate the smooth functioning of domestic life. The act of joining in tea time or adopting similar practices thus becomes a way of synchronising with the household rhythm.

Given that the kitchen has traditionally been constructed as a feminine domain, the gendered organisation of care plays a central role in designing and maintaining the eating practices in the home. In these accounts, men's participation in tea-making or tea-drinking practices reflected an adaptation to the existing moral and temporal order of the household. As per DeVault (1991), food and eating practices are forms of gendered care, so while women's participation and orchestration of tea time activities embody moral labour of care, the men's participation, mediated by women, reflects both adaptation and affirmation of these care roles.

At the same time, the findings revealed that tea time performs unequal work within households. While often described as a moment of relaxation or pause, tea time frequently marked different transitions for different household members, particularly along gendered lines of domestic labour. This highlights how routinised practices can simultaneously provide comfort and reproduce asymmetries in everyday life.

2. Questionnaire

Questionnaire

Introduction:

Thank you for participating in this study about tea-time eating practices. Your input is valuable. Please be as detailed as possible in your responses.

Section 1: Participant Information

1. Age:
2. Profession
3. Education

Section 2: Tea-time Setting and Preferences

4. Can you tell me a bit about your daily routine and lifestyle, particularly concerning tea-time and eating practices?
    a. How often do you have tea during a typical week?
    b. Describe your typical tea-time setting. (Location, time of day, ambience)
    c. What type of tea do you usually consume during tea-time? Why?
    d. Do you have any specific preferences for tea (e.g., herbal, green, black) during certain times of the day or year?

Section 3: Food Choices and Pairings

5. What are some common foods or snacks you consume during tea-time?
6. Could you please describe if there are specific foods that you associate with tea-time?
7. Do you have any cultural or regional influences on your tea-time food choices?

Section 4: Tea-time Rituals and Social Aspects

8. How often do you have tea-time with others? Describe the social aspect of your tea-time.
9. How do your tea-time eating practices change when you have guests or are in a social gathering?
10. Are there any rituals or customs that you are supposed to follow during tea-time?

Section 5: Emotional and Psychological Aspects

11. How does tea-time make you feel? (e.g., relaxed, energized, nostalgic)
12. Do you use tea-time as a way to de-stress or unwind? If so, how?
13. Have there been any memorable or significant tea-time experiences in your life? Please share.

Section 6: Changes Over Time

14. Have your tea-time eating practices evolved over the years? If so, how?
15. Have external factors, such as work or lifestyle changes, influenced your tea-time choices?

Section 7: Future Preferences

16. Are there any changes you would like to make in your tea-time eating practices in the future?
17. Do you have any new foods or teas you'd like to try during tea-time?

Section 8: Additional Comments

18. Is there anything else you would like to share about your tea-time eating practices that we haven't covered?