

SUMMER 2026

Class 12
summer holiday
project

A PERSONAL RESEARCH PAPER

Three Weeks in the *Tasting Room*

Learning to taste tea at the bench of the Bateli Tea Company, my family's business for 105 years

WRITTEN BY

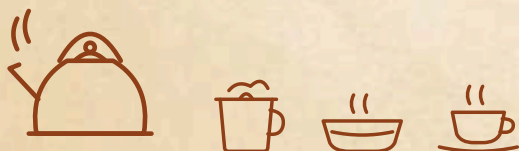
Jahnavi Dalmia
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COURSE

18 May to 5 June 2026
15 morning sessions

NOTEBOOK

214 cups tasted
Completed June 2026



*for my family,
and 105 years of Bateli tea*

Abstract

I am a Class 12 student, and my family has traded tea through the Bateli Tea Company for 105 years. I have heard about its tasting room all my life. In my summer holidays, from 18 May to 5 June 2026, I finally sat at its bench for a fifteen-session course with our senior taster. I kept a notebook of 214 cups and sat four blind tastings; my accuracy rose from 3 in 10 to 8 in 10. This paper records what I learned, and what it felt like to learn it.

I. The room I grew up hearing about

In our house, tea was never just a drink. It was the conversation at dinner, the smell on my father's shirt in the evening, the foil sample packets on the sideboard. Every Bateli story seemed to pass through one room, where people in white coats slurped from spoons and decided what we would sell. As a child, I was not allowed in.

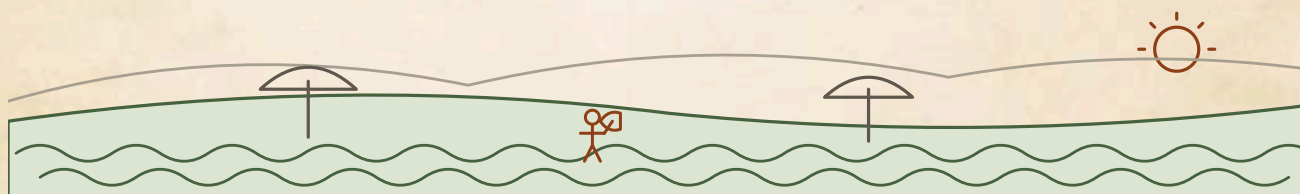
On Monday 18 May I walked in for the first time. It was cooler, brighter and much quieter than I had imagined. Twelve white mugs stood in a line on a long bench, an hourglass at one end, and the air smelled of wet leaf and malt. I felt two things at once: that I had come home, and that I knew nothing at all. I had loved tea my whole life. I could not have told you why.



Seventeen years of hearing about this room. Then, finally, I was inside it!

At the end of the bench. Nobody hurries in this room.

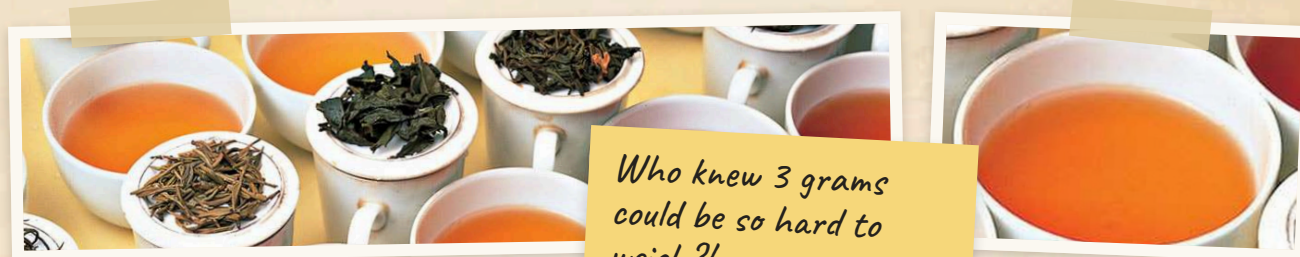
What I wanted to find out: can a palate be trained, how much does the method matter, do trade words change what you taste, and what is it like to learn all this in Class 12?



Every cup starts here: rows of bushes on a hillside, shade trees, a plucker with her basket. Drawn from my memories of visiting tea gardens.

Note to self: Loving tea and understanding it are different things. Growing up around Bateli gave me the love; the bench had to teach me the rest, starting with admitting the gap.

2. Method: making every cup the same



Scale, 0–20 g



Kettle, 2000 W+



Thermometer



Taster's mug, 150 ml



Tasting spoon



Timer

On the first morning, Mr. Ghosh, Bateli's senior taster for over thirty years, held up a white mug and asked what it was for. I said “brewing tea”. He shook his head: “It is for making every tea the same, so you can find out how they are different.” Every variable is fixed so the leaf is the only thing left to vary. I followed our tasting room's guide for all 214 cups.

3 g leaf, weighed to 0.1 g	150 ml filled to the rim	100°C black tea; 75–80°C green	5–6 min identical for every mug
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THE PROTOCOL

1. Weigh each tea into a leaf holder, in a line; note the order.
2. Preheat the mugs; space them 10 cm apart.
3. Fill one mug every five seconds, to the rim, lid on at once.
4. Warm the spoons and set out a bowl per mug.
5. Decant at the same rhythm, so every cup steeps equally long.
6. Turn the wet leaf onto the upturned lid.
7. Taste lightest to strongest, cleansing between cups.

WHAT I RECORDED

One pencil entry per cup: dry leaf and its *nose*, infused leaf, liquor, aroma in bowl and lid, taste, mouthfeel, three to five trade terms, and a liking score kept apart from judgement. Four blind tastings measured progress.

pencil, not ink. ink runs when you splash tea on it (day 1)

Note to self: 3 g in 150 ml for five to six minutes is a fair test, not a recipe. Weighing matters because a gram of fluffy Darjeeling fills three times the spoon of a gram of CTC.

3. WEEK ONE • 18–22 MAY 2026

Learning to *prepare*

I came to taste and spent five days learning to boil water. It was the least glamorous week, and everything after depended on it.



The bench. I had walked past its door a hundred times.

Mon 18

The bench

Mr. Ghosh tasted twelve teas in six minutes without a note. Then it was my turn. I forgot to warm my mugs and tipped leaf into the bowl. Asked about a Nilgiri, I said “nice and light”. *Light in colour? Body? Strength? Thin? Bright?* A Dalmia with no answer, in our own tasting room.

Tue 19

Weight, water, order

My weighings tightened from 2.6–3.5 g to 2.9–3.1 g. One Assam at 2.5, 3 and 3.5 g tasted like three teas. Reboiled water made a flat cup. Then I swapped two mugs and called an Assam a Nilgiri for ten minutes.

Wed 20

The pour

One mug every five seconds, to the rim, lid on, then decanted at the same rhythm. An unheated mug ran six degrees cooler after a minute. By noon my wrist ached. My father laughed at dinner and said that was exactly how he had started.

Thu 21

The wet leaf

One Darjeeling at three, five and seven minutes: thin, right, bitter. Then the leaf on the lid: good black leaf is bright and *coppery* like a new coin; a green tinge means under-fermented. I had thrown away thousands of leaves and never looked at one.

Fri 22

First blind test

Dry leaf: *black* with *bloom* against *grey*, *wiry* against *curly*, *grainy* CTC against *powdery* dust, *golden tip*. Then ten blind cups: **3 out of 10**. I could tell CTC from Orthodox, Darjeeling from Assam, but nothing within a style.



The leaf is the tea's diary. It tells you what happened to it.

Note to self: The preparation is the experiment. Half a gram, a minute or a swapped mug will fool the best palate. And tea is something you look at before you drink: bloom, tip, copper.

4. WEEK TWO • 25–29 MAY 2026

Learning to *taste*

SLURP. Loudly. On purpose. Best class rule ever.

Sniff the bowl, then the underside of the lid. The lid holds the sharper scent.



Spring flush, summer flush: same bushes, different tea.

ASK YOURSELF, EVERY CUP

- How do the liquor and lid smell?
- Which part of the aroma stays?
- What does it remind me of?
- What comes first, what later?

Mon 25 • The slurp

For years I had heard that sound from behind the tasting-room door. Now I made it. The slurp sprays the liquor across the mouth and pulls aroma up to the nose. My first ones dribbled down my chin. Sipped, a Nilgiri was “tea”; slurped, it had a bright edge, clean fruit and a drying grip.

Tue 26 • Aroma has a top and a base

An Assam opened with a sharp note that vanished in a second, over a warm *biscuity* base that stayed. My notes compared teas to toast, raisins and wet earth, and one to the godown smell I remember from visits with my grandfather. That afternoon my nose began to block.

Wed 27 • Tasting with a cold

Every tea became hot brown water. But body, briskness, pungency and astringency were all still there, and for once I attended to them alone. Second blind test: **4 out of 10**, every point from mouthfeel.

Thu 28 • Two flushes of one garden

First-flush Darjeelings: pale gold, floral, brisk, with *point*. Second flushes: amber, fuller, with a ripe muscatel grape. Each garden kept its voice across both seasons; that is *character*. I found the one cup with real *flavour* on my own.

Fri 29 • Beyond black tea

Green tea at full boil was bitter; at 80°C, sweet and nutty. Lapsang Souchong showed that smoke is a fault in every tea but the one built on it. Third blind test: **6 out of 10**, both Darjeelings and their flushes right.

Note to self: Taste is three channels: aroma, the basic tastes, and mouthfeel. The cold took away the first and taught me to read the third. My own memories are the best dictionary I have.

5. WEEK THREE · 1-5 JUNE 2026

Learning to *judge*

Mon 1 June: words in pairs. A buyer pays for strength, colour and quality. Teas chosen to isolate one pair of opposites did what no definition could.

Pair	What it felt like
Brisk / soft	a sparkle, against something round and sleepy
Body / thin	a cup that fills the mouth, against coloured water
Bright / dull / muddy	amber held to the sun, then tired, then river water
Pungent / harsh	a pleasant grip, against something scratchy



Brisk vs pungent: I can finally FEEL the difference!

Assams tasted with milk, the way most Bateli customers drink them.

Tue 2: faults of the factory. Laid out in order of manufacture, faults became a story. Under-withered leaf is *weedy*, like cut grass left in a pile; over-fermented is *fruity*, like old apples. Over-firing rises like a dial:

dry → high-fired → bakey → burnt

Wed 3: the warehouse, and the cream. *Baggy*, *chesty*, *musty* and taints are all avoidable. Four Assams cooled for twenty minutes; the best clouded like tomato soup, a sign it will store well. I tasted it anyway. My palate was gone until lunch.

Thu 4: judging against the grade. A strong CTC is not a failed Darjeeling. We wrote reports on eight lots of the kind Bateli buys. Mine and Mr. Ghosh's for one Assam:

MINE

Black, some bloom, a little bold, some tip. Infusion bright, coppery. Liquor bright, coloury, full, brisk, good pungency, malty. Good for grade.

HIS

Black, bloomy, slightly bold, tippy. Bright, coppery. Coloury, full, brisk, pungent. Good.

FRI 5 JUNE · FINAL

8/10

Ten blind cups, prepared start to finish myself. I split the Darjeeling flushes by the muscatel note, named *bakey* correctly, half-guessed *chesty*, and swapped two Assam grades. Mr. Ghosh wrote one word on my sheet: *Good*. I took it home and showed my father before I took my shoes off.

Note to self: Judge a tea against what it is meant to be, not what I like. Every fault points to one step that went wrong. And a good report gets shorter as you get better.

6. What changed, and why

BLIND TASTINGS, CORRECT OUT OF 10

Fri 22 May		3
Wed 27 May (cold)		4
Fri 29 May		6
Fri 5 June		8

The final set was the hardest and included two faulted samples.



Dry leaf, wet leaf, liquor, strong, lightest.

1.2 → 7.8

trade terms per cup entry, week one to three

45% → 75%

agreement with Mr. Ghosh on a cup's main character

14 → 58

trade terms I could use with confidence

A palate can be trained. Coarse distinctions came in days, fine ones in weeks. Sleep, food and a cold all moved my results, so the habits matter too.

Words change what you notice. After learning *weedy* I found it in teas I had called fresh. My memories of the godown were the hooks that made teas recognisable.

The method does much of the work. Unequal steeping caused the most false differences, then weight, then losing the order.

Learning it is personal. Growing up in tea gave me confidence I had not earned. The bench took it away and gave back something real.

A MAP OF FAULTS BY CAUSE, FROM MY NOTEBOOK

Stage	What goes wrong	Faults in the cup
Withering	too little	<i>weedy, harsh, raw</i>
Rolling, sorting	rough handling, abrasion	<i>brown CTC, grey, ragged</i>
Fermentation	too little / too much	<i>green / fruity, soft</i>
Firing	too hot / too cool / leaking dryer	<i>bakey, burnt / stewed / smokey</i>
Packing, storage	damp, age, strong smells nearby	<i>baggy, chesty, musty, flat, taints</i>

Note to self: Progress was not a straight line. It came in jumps, after a mistake I understood. The fault map now sits inside the cover of my notebook.

7. A pocket glossary, in my words

Bloom · a healthy sheen on dry leaf; noticed most when gone.

Wiry · thin, tightly twisted Orthodox leaf.

Grainy · small, hard, even CTC granules.

Tip · golden buds that show fine plucking.

Coppery · wet leaf the colour of a new coin.

Biscuity · the digestive-biscuit smell of a good Assam.

Brisk · a clean sparkle on the tongue.

Body · fullness and strength that fill the mouth.

Point · a bright, sharp touch at the tip of the tongue.

Pungent · a firm, pleasant grip, with life in it.

Character · a garden's own voice, in every season.

Soft · round, flat and sleepy; the opposite of brisk.

Stewed · tea left standing in a pot; from cool firing.

Weedy · cut grass left in a pile; under-withered.

Chesty · damp cardboard and old wood; poor packing.

Cream · the tomato-soup haze of a cooled Assam.

8. Conclusion

Tasting is not a gift but a practice: a fixed method that lets the tea alone speak, trained senses that notice what is in the cup, and a shared vocabulary that names and directs attention. I learned to slow down, to judge a tea against what it is meant to be, and to be wrong usefully.

For 105 years, people at Bateli have sat at that bench and written down what they tasted. This is one learner's record, with no control group, so it suggests more than it proves. But it is mine: the first page of my own notes in the family's long book of them, written the summer I started Class 12.



*Sunday mornings now:
my father and I taste
the new samples
together.*

Note to self: The tasting room was never a closed door, only a skill I had not learned yet. I am at the beginning, but I know how to sit at the bench now.

