



The Aesthetics of Iteration: A Critical Re-evaluation of Select Tea Fictions

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Received on: 16th May 2026
Accepted on: 27th May 2026

Abstract:

Repetition is often burdensome and hence it creates boredom. However, the contextualization of repetition is not as straightforward as it apparently seems to be. Repetition is often psychological and exerts the mental and psycho-social status of the performers. It evaluates and connotes the several multilayered dimensions of the social and the cultural aspects. In this paper attempts have been made to discuss various issues of repetitions in general with special emphasis on certain tea fictions. In tea fictions necessarily repetitions come as an integral part. Hence lies the focal point of this paper.

Key Words:

repetition, focal point, tea fictions.

Ernst Haeckel's evolutionary dictum, "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny" (Barnes), posits that embryonic development mirrors phylogenetic ancestry, illustrating a shared evolutionary origin. This principle of cyclical repetition extends beyond biology into the socio-cultural and historical realms. Just as the adage "history repeats itself" underscores societal evolution, human behaviour and social interactions do not exist in fragmentation; rather, they undergo a subtle, non-linear progression marked by recurrent cultural motifs. In the contexts of human choices and basic practices, repetitions play unavoidable role addressing the mundane authentic journey and the sincerity of life. Though often dismissed as monotonous routine, this inherent cyclicity possesses a distinct, enduring allure that shapes human expression.

Centrally, repetition serves as the foundational catalyst for systemic methodology, underpinning the strategic execution of complex tasks. The genesis of true competence lies in iterative practice, a process that systematically deconstructs the cognitive friction and hesitation associated with novel tasks into manageable, discrete increments. Through this granular assimilation, disparate conceptual fragments progressively get advanced, ultimately synthesizing into a cohesive, holistic framework of mastery. Far from a stagnant exercise,

deliberate iteration is a dynamic, teleological pursuit — an ongoing trajectory directed toward optimization and refined precision.

This principle of hyper-specialization through iterative discipline is epitomized by martial arts icon Bruce Lee, who famously posited that an interlocutor proficient in a vast multiplicity of disparate techniques poses far less of a threat than one who has distilled their practice into a single, foundational exercise executed ten thousand times (Lee).

When discussing the tea narratives, the idea of repetition appears more meaningful. It becomes inevitable as it deals with the same fashion of the drudgery of life in a more pervasive manner. A less pleasant and colourful practice has been confirmed by the vast majority of tea writing, including tea memoirs. Producing the beverage that has won over the world with its flavour, scent, and taste requires repetitious labor, devoid of any feeling of charm or diversity. It takes place in an atmosphere that fosters such conditions. Living in a tea garden also provides the opportunity for solitary living. The geopolitical situation in a tea garden creates the possibility for the people who live there to be cut off from the rest of the world. Providing adequate care, pruning, and cultivating tea plants are essential. The people who live in the tea garden are missing out on the whole point of life and its purpose. In a tea plantation, the occasional allure of the beauty of the emerald green leaves with an ethereal, ecstatic mental state is nothing more than a fleeting one at most. Several works of literature have been written on tea gardens and tea lives, and many of these works provide a brief portrayal of this ingrained feeling of identity. It is almost identical to a dungeon from which there is no way out.

In one of the early pieces of tea fiction, written by Mulk Raj Anand and titled ‘Two Leaves and a Bud’, there is a description of the mundane and repetitive daily tasks that the tea workers or coolies are required to complete. The worst victims are the coolies and the labourers in a tea plantation area who are made to perform the same mundane and repetitive task day in and day out without any relief. It is practically impossible to deny that they are accustomed to performing tasks of this nature without hesitating or speaking out in defiance of those in charge. Mulk Raj Anand has put a significant amount of emphasis on the narrative from various perspectives. The majority of the time, it is found that the author focuses on the description of the workers and the coolies from their point of view. The whole setting of the narrative is presented in such a way that this places the omniscient narrator in a position in which the readers have no reason to doubt that they are being told the truth about the condition of the unfortunate workers. The enchantment of Mulk Raj Anand’s writing lies in the fact that it appears almost as if the reader is tuned into the day-to-day activities of living with imaginary characters. The novels by Mulk Raj Anand do the finest job of describing the kind of little, insufficient land riddled with mosquitoes in which the residents live their lives of abject destitution.

However, the author emphasizes the fact that the protagonist does not experience any variation in their daily existence. Instead, individuals are compelled to engage in repetitive employment. In addition, this can only occur as a direct result of the gloomy and dire poverty, and the connection is, not surprisingly, made with

matters about money and finances. The employees were subjected to financial exploitation by British tea planters and bureaucrats, who forced them to perform repetitive work under deplorable conditions and gave them no other options. There are two distinct ways to carry out repetition in one's work: the first is to do so out of one's own free will and choice, and the second is to do so under compulsion. In the novel 'Two Leaves and a Bud' by Mulk Raj Anand, the main characters are coerced into performing monotonous labour.

In addition, it is evident from the description that they are no longer enjoying the monotonous work they have been performing. For the protagonist and his family to be able to appreciate and take pleasure in life to its fullest extent, they require a reprieve, an exception, or a different day. Moreover, to get rid of the boredom from the monotonous way of living, the protagonist and his family decide to visit the nearest village fair to celebrate the moments. On the other hand, they are unable to do so in reality. Instead, it is found that they get back to the regular course of life because of their lack of financial stability. Even The children in the household have already begun to develop the skill of adapting their behaviour to the circumstances of a given setting. When they go to the local fair, even if they desire to have something more, they find out about the terrible circumstances that their family is in because of the pecuniary conditions. The young sister fights her instinct to give her younger brother greater room to pursue his version of happiness. Work that requires repetition can frequently have a psychological impact.

In the case of Mulk Raj Anand's 'Two Leaves and a Bud', this act of repetition is tangible, earthy, and grounded in reality. When the workers fail to follow British officials' instructions, they are subjected to open forms of torture, punishment, and intimidation. It seems as though they are living in a hellish nightmare. Despite this, there is no going back, and the characters have no other options. They were also officially restrained by some prefixed agreements that did not allow the workers to leave the location for a particular period.

In addition, it was such a perverse cycle that it made the entire procedure seem like a maze and distorted the fantastical idea they had before arriving at the tea plantation land. When it comes to how they treat the Indian tea coolies, the behaviour of Indian clerks and officials who work directly under the authority of the British government is more Vile and terrible. They are also attempting to make the most of this circumstance by financially and physically benefiting themselves in whatever way they can.

The theme of repetition as the defining characteristic of human and social behaviour is explored in Shona Patel's novel 'Teatime for the Firefly'. This theme has a strong resonance with the reader. The main character of the novel, Layla, does not appear to go through any significant character development throughout the course of the story. The book portrays her more as a witness who is unchanging due to the nature of the character. In spite of the fact that she is a sharp commentator and a perceptive observer, she is portrayed in the narrative's action as little more than a passive bystander. She has a function similar to that of a Greek chorus in the novel 'Teatime for the Firefly', instigating several impulses to make the action nuanced. It is clear that

Layla continues to perform work that is largely repetitive all the way through the narrative of the text. Throughout a sizeable portion of the narrative, she does nothing except read the letters that Manik Deb has written to her. The readers find it difficult to empathise with Layla because of the continuous inactivity on her side, and as a result, they find it difficult to get involved in the story or agree with her perspective.

Nevertheless, there was not a particular selection available. It is possible that Layla is not directly involved in everything that is going on in the scenario, but it is fascinating how the entire story revolves around her. Layla takes full use of her position; she even listens in on the chat that Dada moshai and the other guests are having and continues to perform the same thing over and over again. Obviously, Layla isn't having as much fun with it as she used to, but the fact of the matter is that she doesn't have anything else to do. Layla is caught in a state of disequilibrium which she frequently refers to as her “poor luck.” Despite this, it is very evident that Layla is the personification of a routine labour. She continues to perform the same kind of work as before. She shares the same mentality. Because of this, not much development has taken place in Layla's character. Even when she travels to the Aynakhal tea state, Layla does not engage in much conversation with the wives of other plantation employees. She carves off a specialised space for herself, forming an unseen perimeter that is extremely difficult to breach. Layla is quiet and contemplative rather than talkative and rambling. In addition to that, she is reserved the most of the time. It has frequently caused a mental gulf between her and her husband as well. If there is one type of repetitiveness identified in the case of Layla, the second type of repetitiveness found in the case is more thought-provoking.

The author Shona Patel has depicted in her work of fiction that life in an area dominated by tea plantations is monotonous. There won't be much of a deviation from the normal routine of responsibilities and performances. Manik Deb found himself in numerous precarious situations as a result of his courageous choice to work as a tea planter. Manik never gave a second thought to being an apprentice tea planter despite the fact that he was aware of the gaps in the details and the constraints in life that would befall him. This was because Manik wanted a better, more successful, and happier married life in the future with Layla. The fiction written by Shona Patel perfectly reflects an important turning point in the history of the tea plantation industry in India. It was around this period that the British government allowed aspiring Indian tea planters access to a new market. One of them was a made-up persona by the name of Manik Deb. During the probation time, Manik Deb is required to follow the regulations and orders of the street, just like the European tea planters. Manik and his colleagues were required to remain single and childless for the first three years of their employment as tea planters, beginning shortly after Manik began his new job. Since Shona Patel's novel can also be read as an epistolary novel, it records the boredom that Manik Deb experiences as a result of the repetitive work and execution of his responsibilities. Manik expresses this boredom on a regular basis in letters that he writes to Layla, who was his fiancée at the time. The experience of writing a letter to someone may be very therapeutic, and this is something that can be understood most clearly through the letters that Manik wrote to Layla. Manik writes to Layla in Chapter 9 of the novel:

I have not written a single letter since I have been in Aynakhal, which is almost three months. I feel a strange sense of disconnect with the outside world. Before this job, I had little idea of life in the tea plantations. I was aware tea gardens in Assam are located in remote areas, but Aynakhal Tea Estate seems to be in the godforsaken nowhere. (*Teatime* 87)

The chores and routines that Manik had to perform on a daily basis as an assistant manager in the forest and the tea gardens were never without their share of monotony and routine. Naturally, at first, he found it to be very bothersome, but as time went on, he became accustomed to it and it no longer bothered him as much. It became progressively apparent, through the words of Manik, that he started loving his job from the very depths of his spirit. It is of the utmost importance to remark at this particular level of the novel that readers can get a peek of the remedy to deal with boredom and monotonous job through Manik. This information is highly vital. Despite the fact that Manik is a fictional character, he demonstrates to the readers how one may overcome the monotony of repetitive work by finding a career that they are passionate about. Later on, the readers come to like Manik since it is revealed that, each morning, when Manik is in class wearing the assistant manager's dress and going about his official task, he is observed to be having the time of his life and enjoying every minute of it to the utmost. The lush greenery and diverse wildlife of the Assam area are two of his favourite things. He has a deep affection for the employees, and as a result, he is never reluctant to put himself in their shoes in order to assist them.

In addition to this, Manik was given the result quite quickly. Within a very short amount of time, Manik rose to unprecedented levels of popularity among the workers, labourers, and coolies. Manik looked forward to attending the parties that his European colleagues threw every chance he could, including on the weekends. In a short amount of time, Manik demonstrated that he is a man for all seasons by becoming an extremely popular tennis player among the European employees in the garden. After he was promoted to the position of assistant manager at the tea garden, Layla found out about a new Manik through his writings. Suddenly, Layla comes to the conclusion that this Manik was a man of nothing but positivity and that he did not contain even a single trace of negativity in his makeup. Manik should be read as a well-constructed character by Shona Patel, who could construct the age-old belief on repetitive labour and monotony. Manik is a deep thinker who should be read as a character having philosophy of life of his own. Manik encountered a new incarnation in the form of repetition. He felt comfort in performing the same task on a daily basis. Additionally, that was the key to his success as an assistant tea manager in the garden, thus it was kept a secret.

Things do not continue to go as smoothly as they were in the second half of the book. The second half of the book delves deeper into the political undertones, which reveal a greater degree of unease. Local leaders who adhered to Marxist ideology made efforts to become more involved in the tea garden administrations and aspired to interfere in their decision-making processes more directly. It always resulted in commotion and

unhappiness among the employees of the tea garden, as well as various disturbances that wiped away the quiet administrative routine. In this second phase, Manik Deb is discovered to be completely unsettled, and he gives off an impression of being sloppy and unplanned. He was self-assured enough to believe that he could restore tranquilly to the Aynakhal tea estate in spite of all these disturbances.

M. P Verma's 'The Teatotaler: Reminiscences of a Tea Planter' is another significant text, particularly a memoir that records of Verma's first hand experience of working in different tea gardens of North Bengal and also in Assam. Mr. Verma's subtle observation of the changes in his professional job is well illustrated throughout in this memoir. What Mr. Verma emphasizes more is the theme of repeated works and particularly isolation. Life in a tea garden lacks variety and it is doing the same job daily without giving the opportunity in freedom and to taste the life with all its other flavours. This juxtaposition in life is well illustrated in his memoir perfectly and meticulously. Verma in his writings is found to be home-sick very often. Particularly after the marriage he is found to be torn between other unavoidable obligations. Verma records finally that the life of a planter means obligations to duty and performance without giving much importance to the emotional aspects of life.

In the writings of Søren Kierkegaard, the ideas of repetition are most prominently described and elaborated. Kierkegaard's 'Repetition and Philosophical Crumbles' is a dense text about the importance of repetition and allied philosophical questions. He even also puts his observations in the following manner: "In short, the more competent one becomes, the less one is contented" ('Repetition and Philosophical Crumbs'). He makes his views clear that unlike "recollection", repetition is the courageous movement of moving forward. In all the tea fictions mentioned above undergo common social and cultural binary. Repetition is monotonous for both the planters and the workers in the tea gardens. Interestingly, none of them had the choice to get rid of the monotony of the gardens. However, if we look at the end products of the monotonous experiences, there are benefits and humble growths in all the aspects.

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