

# **Cultural Politics of Food: A Study of Selected Indian Writings**

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## **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

This project began as an investigation of food as a code, embedding social and cultural mores, as represented in the selected food narratives with specific reference to dalit, diaspora and gender. The interface of food politics and literary aesthetics straddles across theorizations as diverse as Amartya Sen's entitlement studies, to caste formations, to the experience of displacement in immigration studies, to the most private domains of home and hearth. The theoretical insights gained through the examination of these divergent literary repertoires, illuminates food as a cogent framework for enunciating social and cultural structures. It becomes an epistemological tool to understand the ontology of the self and helps identify one's space within the world. Deeply implicated within identity politics, food narratives reveal themselves as identity narratives. Dalit, diasporic and gendered identities get marked, narrated and enacted through food and its practices. Garnering the personal insights of the authors into their food narratives, has lent a richer, more nuanced and layered examination of the selected literature. The lens of food, in all its tangible and intangible purports, addresses the vexed questions of identity, power and location. It charts the oscillation of subject positions from the periphery of dominant socio-cultural formations, to centre stage. The topography of food as a visual, olfactory and palatable site, lends itself to entrenched hegemonies, or conversely allows for empowering interventions. Whereas on the one hand it fabricates disenfranchisement and marginalization wrought through the culinary axis of solidarity and distance, on the other it also facilitates processes of assimilation and assertion through culinary mediations.

The socio-ideological grid of food embeds culture, society, economics, hegemony and becomes a tool for gaining visibility and power within the prevailing disquisitions. Food is an important pivot for debates engendering around the problematic of social justice and human rights, a fact which has been repetitively underscored by food experts as well as cultural critics. Food is at the heart of controversies surrounding social justice and helps illuminate the socio-economic structures which collude to oppress an entire people, namely dalits. The critical blueprint provided to dalits by Ambedkar, also inked itself around fight for equality to

draw water from common resources.<sup>1</sup> However, in the absence of a pan-Indian dalit identity or location and the escalation of identity politics, dalit ideologues and writers anchor their ideological moorings on Ambedkar's blueprint and wed it with the regional socio-cultural realities of their locations. The term 'dalit' itself is a metaphor obtained from the process of deprivation and suppression. It is replete with the desire to lay bare the controlling mechanisms of the oppressive Caste System. Even between castes, the rules on food are fraught with contention, with restrictions on the members of each caste with regard to diet food habits. Social inequalities and social-ostracizing, along with natural disasters, land pressures, and apathetic state machinery, collude to make hunger and starvation an omnipresent reality for them.

The ontology of hunger demarcates and calibrates socio-political spaces, as well as cultural and economic ones. Food is the initial and basic need, on whose fulfilment hinges the capacity for other higher order needs. In its abundance or absence, it helps formulate abstract concepts of prestige and virtue. It maintains socio-cultural ascendancies, primarily through its availability and access. Lack of decent food, strips it of its agency endowing capacity to spawn cultural practices which normatively impute identities and help one understand one's place in the world. The food deprivation which stalks dalit life, reduces their food entitlements to subhuman level. Just as shared foods, utensils, food practices and eating spaces, reveal shared cultural identities; exclusionary domains of eating, mark as taboo certain comestibles and communities. It is the contingencies of survival, rather than any other cultural or nutritional value, which guides dalit's consumption behaviours. Lack of this central apparatus of culture, impoverishes their claim to a prestigious cultural legacy. It reduces their activities to such subhuman levels, that these are best disavowed for the recuperation of any sense of self or self-respect.

Food functions as a structuration device<sup>2</sup> on which the dalit narratives hinge. The ontology of dalitness is constructed, conveyed and performed through Hindu caste food practices and transfers, which are instrumental in entrenching caste hegemonies. The status of the food giver is construed as higher and constructed along lines of caste hierarchy. Food is a cultural act and functions as an efficacious identity marker. Patterns of kinship, inclusion/ exclusion are framed and observed primarily around these normative food praxes. Food discourses are eventually shaped by the political economies within which they arise and are important signifiers of shared

values and knowledge systems. Within the discourses of disenfranchisement, water is also appropriated to serve as a structuration device, calling to order ranks of social significations. Through its stratified distribution, hierarchies of wealth and control are established. The socialization of water creates indelible hierarchies of access. The protean entity, which should have been a common and shared resource, is appropriated to impute divisive and immutable social constructs. Food and water entitlements and endowments are perceived to be the fiefdom of the rich. The selected literatures unravel the food politics behind forging disempowerment in certain communities.

Dalit life narratives tend to embed and problematize concepts of entitlement, access, security, ethics and freedom, to reflect on the politics and poetics of oppression. At the centre of the engendering debate on social empowerment and human rights lies the most basic human need, food. In a society ridden by caste hierarchies, food becomes a tool for perpetrating and ensuring oppression in ways which deprive the body of nourishment and the soul of dignity. Dalit writings not only foreground the physiological, psychological, socio economic and spatial impact of this food politics, but also puts into perspective the contours of ‘Dalit-consciousness’ that this manipulative deprivation engenders. Food narratives woven around this ubiquitous substance, and its equally iterative practices, emerge as important contentions on access and entitlement. They help articulate the discursive existential polemics around food, especially in relation to dalit life narratives. These narratives continue the interrogation of the ontologies of food and eating, elucidative of their complicity in instituting human identities and hegemonies. Alimentary investments shape and enable the way individuals think about themselves and the world at large. Exploring these literatures, through the lens of food, creates opportunities for studying caste dynamics which evolve around food. It enhances our understanding of the debilitating nature of marginalization along lines of caste fashioned through food practices.

Dalit writings and autobiographical texts simultaneously construct and deconstruct ‘dalitness’ as a function of ‘food-discourses’. The way dalit autobiographical testimonies deploy food and food practices as a narrative and discursive praxis renders them into simultaneous ‘discourses of oppression and resistance’. While on the one hand it enables them to deconstruct the ‘caste, want and

identity' nexus, on the other it helps them forge biographies and creative pieces of writing into tools of activism, empowerment and agency. In a bid for empowerment the dalit writers deconstruct and subvert the oppressive discourses by appropriating the narration of their deprivation as a tool for intervention. The process of engaging with the concerns of entitlement and human dignity as they are obtained around the trope of food, delineate the roadmap for an equitable society. Food becomes a critical pivot around which dalit writers intertwine tales of their traumatized and starved lives. In foregrounding the dalit existentialist/ historical angst, dalit biographies become crucial conduits for the dalit emancipatory project. As Amartya Sen points out, compulsion for food forces people to do things they resent doing and accept lives with little freedom. This disenfranchisement is a critical ingredient of dalit life/ life narratives. On the one hand whereas dalit food narratives delineate the dystopia of their deprived lives, on the other they help forge the blueprint for an alternate utopia.

Dalit literary articulations are virgin forays into the field of knowledge production, an area hitherto kept out of the reach of the uninitiated, uneducated, and untouchable lower castes. These articulations make multifold impacts. To begin with, the very act of articulation harbours in itself transformatory/ emancipatory potentials. These potentials not only accelerate the processes of acquisition of knowledge, but also facilitate interventions into its production. They transmogrify culinary enunciations into tools of social/ moral transformation. Commensurate with this bid for self-representation, is the need to reject dalit representations in progressive literatures. Consequently, though the writings of progressive ideologues like Premchand brought the mainstream gaze to bear on dalit plight, its sympathetic intent was viewed by the native dalit writers as alienating and disempowering. Premchand's repertoire of short stories also unfolds tales of famishment which dodges dalit existence. However, his portrayal of dalit characters and life are hyphenated through an essentializing mainstream gaze. Though Premchand's food narratives centre stage food deprivation as the primary mechanism of dalit exploitation, but eventually they do not disturb the status quo. Attempting to understand the communities which struggle with perennial starvation from the vantage point of an upper caste sensibility renders accounts which preclude any blueprint for dalit empowerment and emancipation.

Consequently, it is the dalit self-presentations which tell a more authentic tale of dalit food deprivation. They are an attempt to recuperate validation for their histories and culture. However, as posited by theorists, culture is both the origin of individual action and its result. It characterizes a communal heritage as well as the individual acts performed in order to intervene in that heritage. In these contexts, dalit food narratives not only foreground the physiological, psychological, socio-economic and spatial impact of food politics on the lives of their collective, but also insert the contours of ‘dalit-consciousness’ engendered by these manipulative deprivations through individuated acts of writing. Dalit writings turn food narratives into tools of activism, delineating the deprivation in dalit lives in a bid to control and maneuver the mainstream gaze. These food narratives become a political tool in the hands of dalit writers to unravel the ritualized aspects of food as mechanisms of brahmanical/ feudal hegemony and control. The writings function as a diagnostic, aiming to cure the immorality of the higher caste Hindus and the demoralizations within the downtrodden dalit fraternities.

The political dynamics of caste impinge on food, enmeshing it in the lived experience of the daily lives of dalits by entrenching it within the performative parameters of ‘being a Hindu’. Writing about their food deprived, starved, famished lives, dalit writers like Omprakash Valmiki, Sharan Kumar Limbale and Bama interject themselves into the socio-spatial imagine that seeks to circumscribe them within the prescriptive modes of pollution and prohibition. In doing so they lay bare the machinations of socio-religious structures which act as agents of upper caste hegemony and control. Food herein becomes a prop to tell the life story of the caste narrative. The very act of articulation is an empowering one, as not only does the ‘Subaltern speak’<sup>3</sup> but by writing and embedding himself in historical spaces/ imagination, he moves from the fringes to the centre. Socialization patterns engendered through food practices deplete not only the body but also the mind, moral and spirit of these communities, impacting key human development indicators like health, inclusion, sense of bon homie and security. Cultural codes related to food practices function as categories of conceptualization and enjoy remarkable leverage in constructing the disempowered lives of the impure and untouchable dalits. In the lives of the food deprived, food is shorn of its culture creating and sustaining capabilities. Augmenting human life and empowerment, aliment remains the foremost material and metaphor for dalit disenfranchisement.

Food is seminal to discourses constructed around human settlements, societies and families. Food is a language unto itself, which speaks from the inner-most core of our beings to the outer-most boundaries of our familial and social reach. There is a lot of fissuring that happens around food, especially with regard to gender. Food preparation and its related activities form a large chunk of gendered labour. Household is the primary site from which women through their labour produce family life from day to day. Food bestows on the eater, his or her place in the world and in the literatures analyzed, it operates as a very clear gender differentiator. Food narratives articulate the gendered contours of aliment as a powerful social medium, impacting the emotional, psychological and social health of people. Within the household, there are hierarchical power equations which are constructed and reflected cogently through food, its practices and even the utensils used in serving it. Food conventions, which are considered analogous to ‘family values’, help to further consolidate male ascendancy through gendered eating hierarchies. Food is to be understood as a powerful domain of gender performance. This is reflected in gendered food entitlements which are a definitive feature of the hegemonic, hierarchized, households, especially Indian households, where the balance of power is always tilted asymmetrically in favour of men.

Patriarchal hegemonies interpellate men and women’s corporeal relation to food, engendering gendered meanings of food, eating and body image. In these capacities food no longer remains an inanimate comestible, but transforms into a powerful chisel for etching identities and entrenching power discourses along lines of entitlement/ disentitlement. Foodways become a critical locus for standardizing, sanitizing, and stabilizing women in the collective patriarchal legacy. Myths and folklores transmit deeply impacting cultural codes, especially with regard to gendered social roles. Ideations of women as food providers get consolidated through myths around deities like Annapurna. Continually, women turn to such role models for inspiration and derive self-validation through celebrations of the figure of Annapurna. They thereby help further gendered patriarchal notions of womanhood. Within primarily patriarchal cultures, women and their bodies are more responsive and porous to the physiological and psychological impacts of food. In these capacities, food has serious implications for women’s empowerment/ disempowerment, agency/ powerlessness, especially in patriarchal locations like the Indian subcontinent.

The study presents a diversity of responses offered by the various food narratives. Female characters are seen as conforming to patriarchal codes, while simultaneously resisting them. Whereas some voices speak resisting patriarchy, there are others which align themselves with it. Pitching care, nurture as women's domain, authors like Anjali Purohit speak from within the ideological frameworks of patriarchy. However, this remains a stratagem to reinvent the power narrative. Purohit usurps the kitchen locations as women's own space for knowledge creation, sharing and caring. She doesn't challenge the gendered status quo, but appropriates traditional equations of empowerment perpetrated by gendered patriarchal discourses. Her response is more aligned with the contingencies of Third World women, who lead their lives in locations which are deeply inscribed with patriarchal confabulations. It is Aji's knowledge of the power of the ragi grain that gives the protagonist a new lease on life. Similarly, it is Bahinabai's household locations which help engender her ovis, which in turn script the immortalization of her legacy. Moreover, the very act of writing a narrative anchored on alimentary traditions is a 'recipe' for capacitation. She thereby concocts a new prescription for women's enablement, offering a recipe which is more palatable to the lived realities of Third World locations. Purohit pitchforks 'agency' outside the binaries of compliance/ resistance, bringing a more nuanced understanding to the discourses of empowerment.

Ambai's food narratives, yet again, reveal the wide magnitude of goals that women may have, other than resistance. Though the alimentary domain remains a cardinal ingredient in female biological, psychological and sociological destiny, Ambai constantly challenges the normative patriarchal food codes. Many of her protagonists are women who are in pursuit of educational goals, beyond the prescriptive household domains. Depictions of women caught in traditional households resonate with images of domestic emotional and physical abuse and violence, mainly justified as punishment for neglect of food obligations. Ambai also presents food as an empowering marker of building bonds of family and community through cooking and eating. However, individual freedom of choice to alimentary exertions, emerges as a cardinal marker for determining its empowering capacities. The same food which is used as an instrument of control and constraint for Dinakaran's sister-in-law, becomes a marker of bon-homie, love and healing for Chenthiru and the tribal women she encounters in the forest. The food narratives of

Bama and Limbale however, present contrarian formulations. Speaking from the lowest level of Maslow's pyramid, they are unable to recuperate kitchen spaces, labours and productions from the endemic deprivations which surround the existence of dalit in general and dalit women in particular. Delineating the travails of dalit women, Bama intervenes vigorously in the established literary canons, imbuing them with social and ethical rigour. Bama's *Sangati* unravels the food politics which works in insidious ways to oppress both the upper, as well as the lower caste women. Though the higher caste Naicker women have better food endowments, but it is their complete servility to their men's palates and lack of agency towards their own food choices, which reveals the patriarchal food codes at work. In the case of lower caste women, generic food shortage impinges on their food shares. Within the household they hold a lower eating status than enjoyed by the males. However, their participation in the public labour domains brings a degree of independence and assertion, albeit within diminished food resources, to at least the exercise of their own wills and choices. Similar patriarchal hegemonies in food codes are presented by Limbale's narrative, which is rife with the overall misery wrought in dalit lives because of the acute absence of food. Patriarchal food codes reign supreme even within such exigent circumstances. However, there are times when the acuteness of food deprivation challenges the social artifice of gender hierarchy. When Masamai prioritizes her own food requirements before anybody else she brings to fore the existential nature of human needs which in times of exigency routes for the survival of the fittest. Within the locations of dalit food deprivations, the ensuing contest between exigencies of survival and those of gender, the Darwinian codes win, appropriating discourses of entropic scarcity for those of equalizing forces.

The diversity of women's locations, situations and sensibilities, brings a complexity and richness to the analyses of gendered constructions of food. Whereas on the one hand it constricts their independence and agency, on the other it also provides opportunities for creative and emotional fulfillment. The ultimate measure of emancipation and empowerment can neither be prescriptive nor universalized. Making food and recipes allows women a pivotal space in cultural legacies. In these capacities, alimentary knowledge transforms into a powerful tool to be leveraged for visibility and intervention into knowledge systems, hitherto out of bounds for women. In case of recipe writing, recipes become digestible conduits to the retrieve the

traditional culinary knowledge from the past and to harness it to suit the changes of modern day lifestyles and palates. Recipe writing is a product of memory, and a coherent tool to recover lost competencies in order to expand them in webs of collective sharing and culture making. It is also a collaborative device for the promulgation and preservation of culture for posterity. As a cultural act, food goes beyond its physically nourishing potentials, to encircle meanings around which identity, power, and status get naturalized.

As is well documented by Third World feminists, meanings of power range from having a voice, particularly in decision making, to having control of resources. Food, which is a critical resource, is an important part of the various contexts which have silenced and disenfranchised women. Conversely, appropriated by women, food is also regarded as a site for realizing women's creative potential and agency. Through their artisan's involvement with food, women build a large knowledgebase of its medicinal qualities and effects on the human body, thereby re-aligning it as a location of empowerment. Food helps illuminate the social constructions through which overarching caste and gender ideologies are transmitted and reproduced. Working with the materials of food, women cook and dispense it, but largely within the dictates of patriarchal codes. However, in the selected food narratives, these ideological constructs are not merely accommodated and reinforced, but also resisted and interrogated. These alimentary narratives help reformulate questions of agency and reinforce the fallaciousness of uncritically accepting food as a location of women's unilateral subordination. Women have different forms of knowledge experiences and goals, which help them to actively confront patriarchal challenges at home, often in exceptionally ingenious and unique ways. Approaching the covert strategies adopted by women, to privileging their own tastes and to ensure their fair share in food, makes visible a more empowered stance.

Alimentary channels become an important ingress to the epistemology/ontology of the female subjects. Investment in food, both in its preparation and ingestion, regulates female identities. Women are incessantly coping with aliment related social pressures of cooking, staying thin and nurturing through self-abnegation. In addition, gastronomic expertise also becomes a synchronous symbol of the knowledge domains of the householder. Women also help construct piety of the household through practices of fasting and food donations. Therefore, it is along

contours of food procurement and abnegation that the concept of the ‘ideal woman’ gets carved. Women simultaneously become the vicarious eaters of food, as well as food themselves, during gestational and lactating periods of child bearing and rearing. Even though the task of taking care of the children continues for many years, it is only in their own transformation as food that women best exercise control over their food entitlements. Interwoven into the very fabric of the physiology and sociology of a woman, is food with its myriad practices of cooking, preparing, caring, sharing, consuming and abstaining. Ironically, patriarchal food codes accord subordinate status to women’s food entitlements. Furthermore, such entitlements are determined by the dint of their relationship to men. Within patriarchal mores prestige and power sustain only through conjugal affiliations. Consequently, there is a quasi-natural erosion of eating status for widows, whereas married and childbearing women get prioritized in their food entitlements. Food practices not only anchor gender coded disenfranchisements, they also symptomatize the eugenic impulse which seeks to standardize women by regulating their diet, labour, body and life into entrenched patrimonies.

Study of food coherently reveals its historical pathways and the role it plays in comprehending the impulses which maneuver the transition of people. The phenomenon of migration is as old as civilization and integral to the survival of societies. Availability and access to ‘enough food’ is also one of the key motivations for the migrant’s move to food abundant locations. However, attendant cultural encounters bring about the inevitable trauma of displacement. Identity, which is deeply embedded in native lands and culture, is so natural that it is seldom examined or introspected upon. However, it gets problematized in its displacement to alien ambiances and accrues disproportionate prominence. The consequent dislocations, initiate the process of the questioning of one’s own culture, which parts of it to value and which parts to question. Eventually such deliberations impact on the sense of the self, as consolidated notions of who we are shift with the transit into a very different culture. In these contexts, food becomes the foremost point of cultural engagement; an *a priori* marker of cultural identity, its loss and subsequent transformation.

The phenomenon of migration is as old as civilization and integral to the survival of societies. However, its attendant cultural encounters bring about the inevitable trauma of displacement and food herein, becomes a focal point of cultural

engagement. Food emerges as an important site to discuss immigration, globalization, and ethnic difference. Cuisine compellingly plots the hyphenation that brands migrant identities. The displaced consumptions of the migrants, brings to fore the real context of historical construction and recuperation. Other than dietary differences, differentiated food practices of the divergent cultures confronting each other, also help envision divergence. Religious and moralistic screenings of food ingestions further exacerbate this variance. In the imagination of the diaspora, the security of ethnic group identity is imagined just as powerfully through the lineal markings of the indigenous food stores, as it is through the huddles of commensurate settlements. Food functions as ‘social glue’, a centrifugal force, which constitutes communes through bonds of caring and sharing and shapes their somatic and psychosomatic life. Culinary heritage in its ethnic markings, routines and habit formations, impinges on the physical and allegorical body of culture. Alimentary channels act as valuable analytical tools to articulate how the diasporic journeys and their concomitant identity crystallizations are historicized and explained. Food helps enunciate the formations of social structures along the axis of solidarity and distance, augmenting pertinent inclusions/ exclusions.

In the contexts of the shifting cartographies of the migrant populations and the resultant hybridizations, Brillant Savarin’s aphorism, “Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are” appears to be deficient. Processes of globalization have not only shrunk the world, but have also conflicted entrenched notions of cultural legacy. Within the hybridized spaces of the immigrant land, the ethnic Indian cuisines can gain acceptability and relevance through a symbiotic cultural melange. Placing culinary moulting at the centre of this phenomenon blueprints new routes to redesignate geo-political inheritances. As the migrant figures in the selected literatures negotiate the complexities of their displacement, food becomes a valid conduit in the rites of passage to new lands. The converging/ diverging trajectories of their alignments with native cuisines, and the varying degrees of recalibration with the foodscapes of adopted land, map their repatriation.

The diaspora food narratives provide rich and divergent insights into the processes of displacement and assimilation. Jhumpa Lahiri engages with the differences in the dilemmas confronting the first, second and third-generation immigrants. As compared to the first-generation immigrants in her works, the identity

formations of the second and third-generation one's, become progressively less conflicted. Alimentary tropes coherently plot these movements. As the processes of assimilation become more pronounced, the alimentary choices also become less anguished. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's works present a more contested immigrant space. Her short stories revolve around mostly first-generation migrants and analogously present tales wherein the alimentary terrain marks the unselements experienced by the new settlers. The culinary helps the 'imaginary homeland' loom nearby for a speedy reference or recovery. However, as the settling of the migrant becomes less conflicted, it is slowly accorded distance to allow for repatriation and less anguished alimentary conduits help convey this most coherently. Use of magic realism in Divakaruni's novel, consistently aids the nostalgic recuperation of the mystical ethnic past. Divakaruni digs deep into her own indigenous alimentary traditions to create an Indian spice store which offers rejuvenating, albeit momentary, retreat into native locations. Ethnic alimentary channels become a safe passage into foreign culture for the Indian immigrant community, and enables them to skilfully manoeuvre and re-inscribe the shifting realities of America. As such, the spice store and its ethos are attempts to preserve ethnic orientations, a project which is antagonistic to the very purpose of migration. However, the conflict between the native homeland and the adopted land, is reconciled in the union that the two protagonists are able to achieve their honest orientation towards social responsibility. Food emerges in these contexts as a tool for a sincere engagement with the 'other' and allows diversity to be viewed as a valuable and rich spectacle. In Divakaruni's works, identity positions and affiliations are coherently calibrated through food wherein a descending register of culinary anguish, permits for fuller possibilities of cultural assimilation.

Anita Desai's chronicle similarly tethers on food to construct the difference between feasting and fasting bodies. The deployment of the alimentary tropes, not only signify surfeit and deficit for the body, but also for the mind and soul. In these imports, Desai pitches food as a critical marker of collective, as well as singular histories and positions. Clear demarcations between the American and Indian culinary traditions, are seen as anchoring larger cultural differences. The admission of Arun's cuisine choices into the Patton household, allows its members to externalise their discontent with their own, affluent but afflicted, alimentary provisions. The ways in

which various characters relate to food, symptomizes troubled individual psyches and interpersonal relationships. Whereas, on the one hand, displaced alimentary legacies initiate epistemological shifts regarding the precariously positioned migrant identities, on the other food also inheres the potentials of cultural assimilation which can be augmented through reciprocity and accommodation. A willingness, in the characters of Mrs. Patton and Arun, to learn from each other's culture is indicative of the way forward for communities, in order to live together as globalized citizens in a world which is increasingly afflicted in its alimentary provisions and practices.

By preserving and re-creating familiar tastes, the migrant characters in the selected diaspora food narratives reproduce physical, cognitive, and emotional experiences that they deem central to preserving identity. At times, indigenous culinary traditions become a means of agentic expression for the immigrant characters. Food and commensality map the ebb and flow of ethnic and familial bonding, as well as turns into a barometer of the psychic well-being of the displaced immigrant. Eventually, the diaspora food narratives tell tales of perception about the centre from the margins and through gastronomic routes, sequence eventual centripetal movements for the immigrants. The first-generation migrants are portrayed as vicarious and anguished eaters who attempt to evoke their indigenous self through shared gastronomies of the native heritage. Gastronomic choices are less conflicted in the portrayal of the third-generation migrants who, in terms of the grub that they consume, are authentic denizens of America. Food inheres in itself the transformative potentials which can procure or hamper life goals. Even as the culinary becomes a conduit for acculturation into the alternative American spaces, it also offers a powerful medium for creative and transformative interventions into the host culture. In the contested spaces of migrant locations, collective and individual agencies collide and interpellate<sup>4</sup> each other. Food herein emerges powerfully as a structuration device<sup>5</sup>, constantly summoning subjects to reproduce the structures which produce them. Asian American authors have cogently harvested the culinary idiom for riveting depictions of the racialized life of immigrant Indians. As pointed out by critics, South Asian food narratives attempt a more palatable rendering of alterity.

The richness of the analysed food narratives lies in the divergence and diversity of their rearticulated notions of diaspora, home, and nation. These terms are posited not as monolithic spaces, but as historically constituted terrains which are

perennially contested and continuously changing. The culinary narratives portray coherently the power that inheres in food palates and traditions and establish their potency in forging and fissuring bonds. Food and commensality, in their presence and absence, become a cogent register for gauging solidarity or distance. The selected migrant food chronicles posit aliment as a cardinal register for calibrating the displacement and the subsequent repatriation of the diasporic subject. Food presents itself as a text to imagine the discursive constraints of thinking about race. Migration changes the rudiments of the stable ontologies of the self and the alimentary traditions which offer routes into it. Whereas, on the one hand culinary metonymies, through distant/ distinct flavours and odours, help articulate difference, on the other, they also render themselves as tools for aspiring agency and overcoming cultural containment. However, what gets established through these narratives is the cogency of food in marking human identity as culturally entrenched, and its potency in fabricating a space beyond this entrenchment.

The provisions and pathologies of food help illuminate the multifarious trajectories of physiological, social, emotional and cultural health. The healing of the individual, as well as the collective eventually emanates from holistic reparation of the body and the mind. In these contexts, food becomes a vehicle to reach out to other beings in bonds of harmonious commensality, an exotic flavoursome conduit towards ‘digestible difference’. Food is a nurturing practice which sustains the body as well as the soul, permitting a presumably secure knowledge of the self and the world it inhabits. In its materials, practices and forms, it helps enunciate the hermeneutics of the spaces we inhabit. Its conventions, codes, and conceptualizations, spawn potent links with kinship patterns, and regional and ethnic identities. Food is good to think with, about the corporeal and the ethereal. In its voluntary abstinence or prolific donation, it becomes a marker of grace and is an elemental part of cosmological cogitations. In its role as an apparatus of culture’s preservation and perpetration, food is complicit in its processes and very often at its centre. It becomes an agency endowing entity, responsible for assignations of pertinent roles in the historical processes of making food traditions and legacies for posterity. Food narratives provide meaningful frameworks for understanding the theoretical formulations which inform intellectual and cultural production in society, which coheres to food. Food, ultimately emerges as a powerful medium of social ethics and morality. The ethicality

of our consumptions must be sentient and culpable, in order to put civic society on the path of progression.

Extant critical work in the domain of food studies with regard to Indian literatures is limited and provides ample scope for a sustained and ongoing critical interrogation. The influence of current day globalized market dynamics can be harnessed to investigate its impact on the shape and production of current day food literature. Not much work is present, which can offer intensive and enduring perspectives on the position accorded to food in ancient Indian philosophical thought and literatures. Ayurvedic traditions, especially Carak's guna theories, are also verdant ground for food theorization. The field is open for study of local/ regional culinary traditions in India. The lens of food can also be cogently deployed to investigate narratives and poetry woven around aliment. The food metaphors in the bhakti poetry of Namadeva, Eknath and Tukaram offer a rich field to mine for research. Work can also be conducted in a sustained manner with regard to Bahinabai's poetry, which would soon be available in English translation. The culinary heritage of India is very vast, varied and abundant and offers a formidable array of traditions and cuisines to conduct research on. Conclusively, the province of food studies in India is yet to take off in a concerted manner and proffers prolific opportunities for pioneering interventions in food theorization.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> The Charavad Satyagraha.

<sup>2</sup> Anthony Giddens had formulated the theory of structuration wherein social life is constructed through a dialectical relationship between human agency and social structures. Even as the social structures and ideologies interpellate subject/ identity, it is in the repetition of certain performances that actors produce and validate the structures.

<sup>3</sup> The question if the subaltern could speak for himself was first raised by Gayatri Spivak. For details see: Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*.

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<sup>4</sup> The term interpellation is associated with the work of the philosopher Louis Althusser. According to him individual subjects are seen as products of social forces, rather than independent agents with self-created identities. He proposed that social practices evolve at the intersection of structures and agents.

<sup>5</sup> This was a theory proposed by the sociologist, Anthony Giddens in his acclaimed work, *The Constitution of Society*. He proposed that social practices evolve at the intersection of structures and agents. He proposed three kinds of structure in a social system. The first was signification, where meanings get coded within practices of language or discourse. The second structure consisted of legitimizing these prescriptive outlooks, which were then lodged as societal norms and values. The final element according to Giddens is domination, and is concerned with the application of power with particular regard to the control of resources.