**Part A: Describe your food memory as vividly as possible.**

**The Setting:**

I can clearly remember the day I had one of my core happy memory from my childhood. I was in Nainital, a hill station a couple of hundred kilometres north of New Delhi. My maternal grandmother owned an old family house by the lake where she invited every family member once a year during the summer holidays for a family weekend trip. The air was filled with the scent of rain and the distant sound of street vendors. My family gathered around a large dining table on the veranda.

**The People:**

All of my family was present at the place my parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Laughter and conversation filled the air as we shared stories and enjoyed each other's company.

**The Meal:**

My grandmother always prepares two dishes whenever I come to meet her. One of them is her famous spicy potato swirl, in which she slices the potatoes into thin disc shapes, seasons them with all the spices you can find in her kitchen, adds a tangy Schezwan sauce, and bakes them. It is the most delicious thing you can have. The second one was her famous biryani. The rich aroma of basmati rice, saffron, and spices like cinnamon, cloves, and cardamom wafted through the air. Each grain of rice was perfectly cooked, mixed with tender pieces of marinated chicken and boiled eggs. On top of that, she cooks it in a handi (clay pot), as biryani was originally cooked in the handi, as it is the best way to slow cook something and give it a little smoky flavour.

**The Experience:**

As I took my first bite, the flavours exploded in my mouth. The spiced chicken, fragrant rice, and the hint of mint and coriander melded together in perfect harmony. The warmth of the biryani was complemented by the cool, creamy texture of raita, a yoghurt-based side dish with cucumbers and mint. The spicy potatoes were accompanied by freshly made naan, its surface golden and speckled with garlic and butter. We drank sweet lassi, the perfect blend of yoghurt and sugar. The meal concluded with a serving of my grandmother's famous kheer, a rice pudding flavoured with cardamom and garnished with almonds and pistachios.

**The Feelings:**

The meal brought a sense of comfort and belonging. The food was delicious, but the real joy came from the shared experience with my family. The meal was a celebration of love, tradition, and togetherness. To this date whenever I have those potatoes or biryani, that memory of the pleasant day ripples in my mind.

**Part B: Critical Thinking Component**

Reflecting on my food memory, I find similarity with the sociological concept of “commensality”, After going through the course reading of the previous weeks, particularly in week 2, we read about the impact of food on society, how it connects us, makes a coherent environment which emphasizes the social significance of sharing meals together (Zhen, n.d.). My experience of being together with my family at my grandmother's lake house has the essence of family dining and demonstrates the powerful impact that food has on forming social bonds and cultural identities.

We all felt that we had to spend every summer vacation together, and the act of eating together around the dining table developed into something of a ritual that strengthened our common cultural history and ties to one another. The act of sharing a meal together paved the way for deep relationships and cherished memories to form. The meal developed to reflect our family's unity and shared experiences as a result of the stories, jokes, anecdotes, and love that were exchanged over it.

Moreover, the meal's significance went beyond our social surroundings to take into account more widespread cultural customs and practices. My grandmother's cooking, including the handi-cooked biryani and the spicy potato swirl, not only made us nostalgic but also had flavours, scents, and cooking methods that had been passed down through the ages. There is a similarity between Russo's story and one of this week's stories, "Savouring Memories of Sunday Dinner by Susan Rosso," where the cooking of classic Italian-American meals like "gravy" and meatballs is a reflection of a long-standing culinary custom that has been passed down through the years (Russo, 2007).

My food memory essentially shows how food helps building one's identity, cultural expression, and social engagement. I see the transforming impact that eating meals with loved ones in creating a sense of connection to one's cultural history and belonging via the lens of commensality. I am reminded of the continuing relevance of something as apparently basic as breaking bread together in establishing family ties and preserving cultural customs as I continue to examine sociological topics

**References:**

* Zhen, W. (n.d.). Rethinking Food Policy: A Fresh Approach to Policy and Practice.
* Russo, S. (2007, December 12). Savouring Memories of Sunday Dinner. Retrieved from https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=16974705