

# Memorialising Food: The ‘Authentic’ as Volatile

Saumya Shah

Department of English, University of Delhi

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**Abstract**— *Through the exploration of Eating Habits by Chitrita Banerji as the primary text, I have built my ideas on the issue of Migration as reframing culinary practices, the Edible Chronotope that surround the spatial transformations abiding different locales and specific food contexts that structure a historical lineage. I have explored the limitations of capitalism in the realization of the 'actual' tastes, also emphasizing on the Indianness the latter, constitutes. While foregrounding these imperatives, I have analysed the local and sustainable in a social context, the consumer 'taste', food sociability and the ethnic ritual of adherence. The conversations around the 'Indigenous Pot', adaptation, assimilation, and regeneration compel us to think in terms of the global impact on Culinary Tourism and how that transforms our food habits to the extent of making a historical change. Since the text explores culinary practices from all over India, it tends to build around the osmosis of habits, the colonial repercussions and the broadening of cultural reflexivities.*

**Index Terms**— Culinary, Nation, Colonialism, Migration and Authenticity..

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Eating as a habit is usually among those aspects of life that render a biological settlement to its act, rather than an assertive priority in the formative years. Therefore, what we ‘eat’ is synchronously a decisive intuition to live and not a sensory delight to relish. But, the evolvement of the human race with its own paradigm of food relationality and obtainability has emerged to signify a certain category of the diet as ‘food’. This certain category is transformatively more nourishing and ofcourse, ‘alimentary’. But, who decides the alimentary? What are the parameters of the ailmentary that ensures a certain ‘ordinary’ or ‘maligning’ nature? Moreover, what are the institutions mining to propagate through this category of food habits that are now becoming transient and volatile? How do we protect the indigenous and accustomed in the wake of capitalism? These are some of the questions that would be argued upon while informing the narrative through the context of Chitrita Banerji’s book, ‘Eating India: Exploring a Nation’s Cuisine.’

Pierre Bourdieu while discussing artistic perception by acquisition of legitimate culture talks about insensible familiarization within family circles that tends to favour an enchanted experience of culture and is equally cognizant of the forgetfulness that empowers that acquisition’ (Bourdieu, 3). Culture as a device or a sign then, replicates the understanding of norms and applies these ‘chain-values’ or precisely ‘tastes’ in a unidirectional format. This culture not only is “enchanted” but also “hyper-realised” and its notions often seamlessly excused. The ‘pure’ gaze as emphasized upon by Bourdieu is then a historical invention, imposing its own norms on both the production and consumption of its products” (Bourdieu, 4). It is the preserved category of action and consequence significantly inedible and “ribbed”. The primal narrative or habit is cardinal to the custom that inhabit a particular food ritual. The interpretative and recognizable tradition is used to make food as a constant trope for the examination of perception, felt historically and also its

current ramification.

## II. TASTES AS ‘NATIONAL’

The homegenization of tastes as a precursor to the ‘national’ cuisine and the singularity of an imperial cuisine function as recurrent motifs to delineate a difference between the self and the Other (Shankar, 289). What constitutes the familiarity to the personal or ethnic is juxtaposed with the exotic ‘inflammation of a coloniser. The specificity of cuisines is borne to prepare and demand ideologies more than nationalities. As was seen in the 2011-12 NSSO data, 1.4 percent Hindus reported having eaten beef/buffalo in the month preceding the survey (42 percent of Indian Muslims and 26 percent Christians had also eaten beef.) Out of these 13.5 million Hindus who eat beef, 70-80 percent were Dalits (Shankar, 285). The religious and political stigma requires a shift to a progressively ‘mainstream’ assumption of life wherein higher ideals of preservation take the form of conceived and propagated theories or rather dogmas. The taxonomic prestige sired is consequently a marker of social status and distinctively, its upgradation for a better positionality. Reflections on the caste terrain is not only obligatory but also innocuously a ‘purificational’ attempt at uncovering the propelled version of discourse. The medium of food being extremely social is quite a formal and congenial mode of reversing these “cultural categories” that encroach and endanger while delimiting the assets of meal-preference (Douglas, 272). The culinary medium is an exercise to classify with the purpose of engaging with the essentialities that have emerged while repurposing the eradication of food-guilt.

*"Mopping up these viscous delicacies required a mental and digital dexterity that eating with cutlery did not."*  
(Chaterji, xvii)

There is more of an amplified necessity involved in the practice that is not just inclined towards lineage but also towards some local and social contracts that apportion boundaries. It is the banana leaf and not bone-China whose

exclusivity is being catered to, so the boundaries of the characterization of the region-specific. Every chapter in the book strives to put forth a visual imagery (quite literally), reminiscing the "authentic" cuisine of certain chapter/state/society/region. These synonymous but allocated terms signify the sacrament ahead and also the descendancy of the ethnic with it. In 'Bengal: Land of a thousand Rivers,' the intriguing gastronomic command is owned by the 'Shukto', a heterogenous 'cooling dish that is suitable for the torrid hot summers of India.] The reference to the Ayurveda and the Bhakti movement is affiliated with native cultural ties that are originating in nature rather than delivered. Shukto's profligacy as a construct of a regional plate has more to do with its "honoured status in hindu gastronomy in medieval times" and hence, the indulgence that the author is trying to simulate for the reader is typically visible and felt (Banerji,12). The "Panchphoron", as having an indispensable solidarity with 'Bengaliness' is enthusiastically portrayed to mark an exquisite amalgamation. The definition of Panchaphoron as a mixture of five condiments in equal quantities employed in Bengali cooking is thus, a sign that unmistakably constructs ethnic identity and its particular quantity and method in subsequent dishes embodies the sustenance of the inimitable design of cooking spatially (Achaya, 176).

### III. THE HIERARCHY OF FOOD

*"How can go back to vegetables after eating a big portion of richly spiced meat? I say" (Banerji, 16)*

An intersection of culture where the engagement with food is closely linked to certain stereotypes of essence have paved way to counter and build negotiations for the same. As Forson argues, "Black people have been engaged in ideological warfare involving food, race, and identity and certain stereotypes are still pervasive in the contemporary American psyche" (Forson, 9). Vegetables for the Indian psyche, then devotes purity and its sequential consumption a prioritized normativity. A piece of meat is either too much of luxury or prodigality to be consumed before the simplicity of the vegetable in question. It is the sensibility that devotes an enormous encoding of the sociological class, to affirm and subsequently, continue. While on the topic of purity it also becomes imperative to argue India's deep association with death and its related practices, the "proximity of certain items and their permissibility' brings us closer to the symbolic ideal of transmigration (Banerji, 18). When Levi Strauss calls the boiled, life and the wasted death, it is the insistence on the boiling part that subsumes "cosmic totality" very akin to the idea of austerity mentioned by Banerji in the text (Strauss, 44).

The chhana based sweets like sandesh and rosogolla with chhana as a central ingredient is apprehended as the pivotal migratory food to have been consolidated into the Indian cuisine. The breaking of milk as an Aryan taboo to the sinful item being traced rapidly through the Portuguese introduction

to the Indian subcontinent, this ingredient has been manifested as a quintessential fusion of colonialism, its remaking of communities and the consumption as affiliative (Achaya, 41). Its interesting how marriages work to create a profusion of familiarity while re-constituting the edible as increasingly polyethnic. The integration of the Iberian and Indian with cohabitation as osmosis of habits and civilisational peculiarities, it becomes inviolably a metaphor for an upheaval and exotic policies as amended predispositions. In pursuit of what might seem an inadvertent landscape of diverse food affiliations, it is mandatory to position entanglements as products of globalisation and capitalism. Globalisation as a trope works to play a significant role in arbitrating the possibilities of fraternizing ingredients. This fraternity then evokes the inherent questions of rootedness and belonging, often leading to unique reiterations of culture and a directional sense of cohesiveness in the culinary spaces.

The home, community and country as general spaces that inhabit the crux of the body is thus an essential application while considering a food affect. The theorization of capitalism while invoking the opium cultivation of the nineteenth century or intensive commodification of farming, the adverse fetishization of exploitative systems is already in place. It is not the ancient then, that encompasses the legality of economic and political activity but also the rational modern, signifying a rupture of interest. A strong categorization of quality and quantity as favoured agencies of distribution have programmed the ubiquitous tenets of capitalism while defining distribution also on the basis, of the producer, produced and distributed. The global chain supply is affected by this neo-colonial brand of egalitarianism where the 'poor' is fed just the proportionate quantity, relying on data to solve corporeal issues. The body in consonance with capitalism then is not anymore, a "doctrine of consumer sovereignty but a greater sovereign force" (Albritton, 343). 'Sweetness' as an endemic appetite is a mythicized conception and any beverage, sweetmeat or sugar food is thus, a classic example of initiating the consumerist craving as a prerogative of corporations' 'processing' worldwide.

### IV. INDIAN IN ESSENCE

The rhizomatic identification of the Indian community with immense stretches of the boundaries, the situatedness of land co-habiting these borders and the deepening analysis of a former location as "enemy," at present serves to decipher the new millennium's crisis of containment. When the 1947 Partition of India is taken cognizance of, Banerji brings in the metaphors of the Road, Temples, the western life or largely the British Raj and very exquisitely of food. The G.T. Road as a symbolic juncture of connections is now the Golden Quadrilateral much akin to the desirous broadening of transcendence. This transcendence in this context is not just about national identities but also about cultural reflexivities. What might seem to accommodate a certain culture prototype

affirming origins is no more exclusively related to it. The quadrilateral as a medieval symbol is noted for its potential role in migration, massacre and communicative dissemination of material resources. Leersen argues on the use of Imagology that sets out parameters on making sense of the world around us (Leersen, 13). The use of nation, stereotype, character perceived history and Nationalism are few dialogic assumptions to frame an undulating persuasion about the idea of Identity as a whole (Leersen, 14). From covering "naïve essentialism to establishing real national temperaments" the journey from East to West is framed by seasonings of the wealthy, peasantry, mysticism, the labourer protocol (Dhabas), and of course, the primeval in terms of what is contemporarily grown (Leersen, 15).

The 'Anglo-Indian table has various reference to a War that are significantly a promise for a better future. The future, although incongruous sets up a loyalty that has remained through the rest of the life, mainly in terms of what is internally put into the body. The food is internal even if it has a tactile connection with the British, as pernicious invaders or as mystic in immersing the seed of compassion and service. The loyalty or compatibility that I talk about is an exchange of ethnography partially and temporally. Migration places an individual's sense of being and belonging into a state of flux as they become pulled in multiple directions and consequently need to re-construct identifies and relations (Abbots, 3). The loyalties then become re-negotiated something very similar to what we encounter in Prafulla and Prabir's character in the novel. Their ways are anglicized, their affinities are impersonal and their subjectivities have become a part of the culinary 'other'.

Jhumpa Lahiri in the 'Indian Takeout' discursively reinvents, the principles of having found a new culinary identity while vividly 'remembering' the former generations attempts in consuming originality. There's a certain distant gaze that proliferates the writers description and being brought up in New York, it convincingly creates the "possessed" character of the father with equitable adherence to covetous urge to contain commodities of the native land. There is also a burden of carriage that we see in the children demonstrating the parallel alimentary anxiety in the event of relocation. The rooted culinary imaginations immerse with the safe traditional sites of security and certainty. Lahiri, while instituting a travelogue-like mechanism provides an assertive accompaniment of "strained connections" that make visible an ambience of hybridization, in terms of location (Mannur, 66).

Amritsar's sacred 'pool of nectar' is quite characteristically weaved in terms of smell, texture and alliance. While the visible trope, i.e., the Golden Temple offers a 'shrinic' motivation to the Sikh community, it is the culinary resourcefulness that garners attention, worldwide. The invisible trope, i.e, religions when contemplated upon harbors a necessary difference from the ideal worship that has been tentatively observed. It is the equality of remembrance

in the name of the Holy that instills discipline in a sacrosanct manner, also keeping in mind, the fact that a distinct place of worship has so many times been attacked, maligned and disparaged. Food served here is 'received' and in this deeply rooted and lived reality," I see the anxiety of a nationalist and diasporic unity blossom (Banerji, 122) (Mannur, 11). The major reflection with all the gastronomic entities that are being encountered in the act of philanthropy is the use of wheat at an extensive scale. Rice is although present, but it does not take a central category when we think about 'langars'. Rice is an eastern crop and therefore the availability becomes a majority food through centuries. Nancy Pollock argues the case of rice when she asserts its importance during food aids sent to locales of environmental disasters as a well as financial downturns. Rice has also been important to food security in the face of food shortages for both household and national economies (Pollock, 106).

The "fictional democratic home space" vested by Banerji in her nominated States points towards the allocation of culinary functionality (Mitra, 435). The search for authenticity is further a reservation that seeps national interests and becomes performative in the enactment of values and prejudices. "Culinary purity," as has been discussed to some extent earlier is again something, that encroaches the heritage and convention with the lenses of an immigrant. When the "last bastions of culinary authenticity and continuity in India, i.e., the temples or Gurudwaras are described as immutably rooted," it is thus the cultural identity that they try to preserve rather than any culinary experience (Banerji, 123). The scriptural palatable blueprint provided at places of worship harbours the necessity of faith and worship. So, if the "outside world", as we usually call it has the appetite for experimentation, it is the subjectification of the scriptural into the neutral and the gastronomical.

## V. HOME AND BELONGING

The ways of adapting, assimilating and regenerating to newer cultural and culinary forms is a consequence of history and memory being played out in varying degrees of diversity and succumbing evocations (Mitra, 436). It is not wrong to say therefore that different stereotypes under one head "Indian cuisine" already demonstrate the elements of fusion, and assimilation at work in forming a national culture (Mitra, 438). Banerji strives to find the authentic in all derivative locales, enunciating the criteria for finding food with an inheritance rather than just echoes. It is either the traditional and amalgamated bland or spicy Khichuri/Khichdi that pedigrees the spaces of 'Indianness' or the 'halwa' of the Golden Temple that traverses frameworks to resurrect the visibility of lavish but egalitarian meals.

Food acts as a local entity when it creates spaces of any character that wages conflict to the regular dimension of that specific space. The edible chronotope then plays a role in perimeter-ing the confines and extremities of a distinct cultural space. What intersects usually is the social mobility

of food as a category wherein it performs the obligation of a habitual gesture while also inculcating the popular. The "immovable" buildings of Goa, its Portuguese heritage, the conquerors' or missionaries vision are rehearsals of an indelible past that co-incides with the 'vindaloo' of the present, sometimes also managing to dock the coastal with the heretical. What becomes so different about a certain locale in Amritsar is stitched to foresee the lingering similarity with the colonial entities of the determining portion and the subtlety of its continuous pleasing modesty. When we talk about national systems of cultural preservation and classify the "moving" and "immoving" heritage, it is perhaps claimed that movement is a better characterizing element than materiality and therefore, through the travelogue that institutes necessary continuity, it becomes strengthened (Savova, 4). We could see the "writer" and the "reader" in a process of "emphatic kinesthetic perception" where one immediately experiences the movement of the other (Savova, 5). The richness or the embodiment of this spatial and temporal dimension becomes a ruptured aesthetics of what the nation holds in particular. It is the experience of the body in position with the social life in action that normativizes the compelling flux of 'authentic' foods. The secular life, the immigrant status, the forthcoming benevolence of 'tasting' and the emotional scale prevalent is demonstrative of signifying the composite economies of a re-settled life/lives while documenting the strategies.

'The Indigenous Pot', is a gregarious view. It depicts the 'circle' of life with food in the middle, making a critical staging of food in the periodic uprising or evolvment of the human race. It is interesting to note that the rectangular image entails domestication, co-existence between the 'venomous' and the innocuous and use of culture as a means of affability. The cooking pot, the fire of the anthropoid invention and institutive efforts to conjoin various methods forms a dialectic expression of the 'indigenous' referred to. The Tribal communities/societies constitute the pith and substance of what they sustain upon. The categorization of the Tribal is arguable in terms of binaries created through analogic chosen mechanisms. As Banerji puts forth, it is the language, social organisation, religious affiliation and self-identification that play prominent roles in consolidating the tribal. It is with the idea of the "outskirts" that we symbolize the participation and practice of the tribal (Banerji, 293).

On a similar periphery, there is a reminiscence of the undivided India that pervades as a necessary reliance to the means of cooking. Fermentation occupies primeval position for the Bodos of Assam, the people in Meghalaya or Tripura, not to ignore the similarity of this process prevalent in Vietnam. The extensiveness of the process is an inculcation, the union of the provincial with the national and the weaving of communal and spiritual dynamics of cultural memory (Savova, 20). A parallel that is drawn to incorporate distance and conflict into numerous mouthwatering delicacies is right

in asserting the fish, pork, soybean or even the vegetable as a mainstream product. The use of microbes, its dilution and action henceforth in the ancient beverages or foods is something that arose from the Indus Valley Civilization itself (Achaya, 25). But, it is the drink and not the food item that insinuates a logical lineage in terms of scriptural or spiritual predicament. While the performative during the Rig-Vedic times could be fascinating, it is the proliferation of the filtered element through the Gupta period that exhibits the eternal in the 'instructional' beverage. When Arundhati Roy agrees that peoples' 'own histories' have to be written but policing the territory of representation into a formal policy can become counterproductive, it is the flourished liberalism whose maturity is being visited upon (Rege, 12). The margins that we question, the jingoism of the purified nation, dissipated frailties is something that engages upon the foreign-ness of the cultural reader as well as the inclusion of authentic as mystery. What 'saffron' denotes then, is not the Geographical Indication Tag, but a re-assertion of aesthetically illuminating metaphors of superiority. There is a certain dominant practice wherein the tribal dishes are devoid of fat and the cuisine of Kashmir is exhausting by about lounging on fried, smoked and grilled fat. It is the *Rista, Gushtaba, Roghan Josh, Tabak Maz and Kebabs* that preserve the ingenuity of Kashmir's sublimity. Drawing an alliance to Brahminism and its various subcategories the prejudice of eating is recalibrated. The Kashmiri Brahmin's similarity to Bengali Brahmins in aspects related to non-vegetarianism tends to distinguish the "authenticity" in not just the hierarchical caste experience, but food experience too. Dean MacCannell's idea of "staged authenticity" describes the forms in which certain presentations of familiarity become definitions and typologies (Long, 3). These definitional typologies then mark a legendary historical presence mired in folklore, determining battles and adaptable legitimacy. The warranted desire of Kashmir is what voluntarily embellishes the distinct pleasures of the romantic into a semi-spiritual object of gaze (Long, 4).

It is worth enumerating that the 'Phallus' as a form of worship has been an authoritative prerogative to the sacred. The genesis seemingly is inherent in the stone structures (geological confirmations) found rather than articulated testimony. It is the 'Aryan infiltration' that commands the idea of Brahminism, invoking the 'Chandal' and 'Nishada' as categorically 'corrupt and foul'. It becomes strongly visible in the narrative that the visible trope of the woman is compulsorily absent in discourse. While the circle around the Indigenous pot is created by the women, it is interesting to radically examine the phallus as food benefactors than women. The conceptualization of food preparation in the domestic sphere is a matter of heteronormative functionalities, its monolithic subservience and eventually its "logical" trivialities (Mannur, 225). Women dying in different domestic spaces whilst playing confirmative roles is something that the universe of 'Eating Habits' spends prompt

energy upon. If its 'A Southern Thali in Karnataka' where the abundantly 'American corn' is a signifier of the woman's resistance at being objected to a photograph or the Northern 'Saffron Desire' invoking the magical into a nostalgic memorial, the women weave and transform the reign of the household. Even Draupadi with her Agency, provided by the sun God acts as a re-integration of transgression-dwelling, culinary rescue. The engendering consummation of roles to proliferate and structuralize "food figures" is suggestive of a certain "sex act" (Mannur, 231). This sex act is socially defined and the routinized nature of work is what makes affections a totally betrothed metaphor (Mannur, 232).

## VI. CONCLUSION

The 'Culinary Tourism' explored in the text manifests itself in a leisurely manner and testifies the theory that "participation occurs specifically because of the perceived otherness of the foodways, and that other elicits curiosity." (Long, 1) The narrative while constructing the national tries to merge the regional Bengal into the thread, convincingly because of the knowability but largely because of the distinct self there is, in the topically palpable Bengal. The journey is a tribute to an elaborate diversity that possesses participation in its physical, social, cultural and culinary variables to familiarize the "tourist gaze" and inform the autogenous scrutiny (Long, 24).

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