

CHAPTER II

UNSERSTANDING FOOD CULTURE: DIFFERENT METHODOLOGIES

2.1. INTRODUCTION

In general, history is related to memory and it focuses on the past. Writing history and its approaches to record the memory of the past differ from time to time. Historiography not only includes the narration of the past but also theorises the narratives. To explain the significance of the subject food historians always find it necessary. In general concept, food is simply planted, harvested, processed, transported, sold and consumed. When food is studied in different contexts readers find it complex usually for the role the food plays in human society. As an ideal cultural symbol food allows the historians to uncover the hidden levels of meaning in social relationship. These social relationships arrive at new understandings of the human experience. As a marginal subject of interest to a few agricultural historians as well as to one its reorganization for exploring new dimensions of the past is a transformation of food. A growing reorganization of legitimacy as a field of study and a framework for the study of food history was established by early efforts. A generation ago, propelled by the hope for a new direction for the discipline, the *Annales E. S. C.* published a series of articles on food and nutrition, many of them concentrating on diets and using rations as evidence that staked out the new terrain (Dutch, Swedish, Russian, English, and French soldiers and sailors were among the many groups analyzed in the *Annales. E. S. C.* in the 1960s). An occasional best seller like Alfred Crosby's *The Columbian Exchange* (1972) published to understand food studies began to gather strength and momentum. Food studies have become more specific and particular as well as more general and comprehensive. At the criss- cross of research the explanation and interpretation regarding the meaning of food is not clearly given in the context of class, society, culture, time and space.

On the basis of centrality of consumption the theorists of modernity and post- modernity come into an agreement that indicates the modern capitalism

and contemporary culture. At the turn of twentieth century consumption was a decisive force behind modern capitalism, its dynamism and social structure for the theorists like Werner Sombart, Emile Durkheim and Thorstein Veblen. More recently, Giddens has presented consumerism as simultaneous cause and therapeutic response to the crisis of identities emanating from pluralisation of communities, values and knowledge in 'post traditional society' (cited in Frank Trentmann, 2004). Braudrillard the famous post- modernist thinker emphasizes consumption as the semiotic code constituting post- modernity itself: ultimately, signs are consumed, not objects (cited in Frank Trentmann, 2004). These theoretical interpretations need historical implications to identify actually what consumer society is. To provide commentary on modernity or post modernity certain ideal- typical constructs of society such as traditional consumer, modern consumer and post- modern consumer are encountered. As these present holistic, static and finished end products therefore, they are less helpful for a historical understanding of consumption. Thus question arises regarding the unit of enquiry for historical research. Historians have avoided writing about history of consumer culture as they find the interpretative problem. Class and society is replaced by consumer society as the profession is not theory challenged. To the broader debate about consumption in the social sciences and humanities, the first wave of historical studies in the late 1970s and 1980s, a split has effectively limited the contribution of history. Later different methodologies have been upbringing from different fields of anthropology, cultural and social history, and gender studies.

2.2. FOOD STUDIES AND ITS IMPORTANCE

Food is our primary biological drive. Without food we cannot live. Like the importance of food in human needs it is important elsewhere also. Food business is the world's largest business employing millions and millions of workers. Food has not only material importance but it is important in cultural and symbolic fields too. The human relationship with food starts with produce, procure, prepare and consume. This cycle represents powerful systems of symbols and food related beliefs, taboos, background knowledge can speak

volumes about the people. By exploring these elements the representation of food can be strengthened by good research. But the term “food studies” does not refer to the study of food only. Production, agriculture, food science, bio chemistry, nutrition are filed to study food. Food studies are related to various subjects like cultural and community nutrition, agro- economics and food marketing. Food brings together multiple scientific disciplines e.g. microbiology, chemical engineering, biochemistry and food scientists may study more fundamental phenomena in their own way in specific fields related to its production and properties. Food studies include the relationship between foods and human beings and how they experience with it. In primary and secondary education as well as in academy, in mass media food studies have a prominent place. But food studies is relatively new to the table while it’s beginning to gain prominence with more books on food subjects, television shows, educational initiatives and conference panels. Rozin (1999) pointed out that food is fun. Belasco (2005, pp. 6- 8) details many factors that might contribute to food studies’ under- representation in the academy, among them: the dualistic tradition in Western philosophy that prizes the mind over body, the association of food with the domain of women by men, and the efforts of industry to “obscure and mystify the links between the farm and the dinner table” (Belasco, 2008, pp.4 cited in Miller & Deutsch, 2009; pp. 7). The perspective of food studies is different and that is why multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary study has evolved. To take an interdisciplinary approach often food studies scholars have training in one particular discipline by incorporating theories and methods from other disciplines. The Association for the Study of Food and Society founded in 1985, which is an organization comprised food historians, anthropologists, nutritionist, sociologists, food scholars from interdisciplinary fields and all these scholars from various fields discuss their work from different perspectives. Food studies is considered as multidisciplinary and journals related to food studies such as *Gastronomica*, *Food, Culture and Society* publish scholarly and literary research papers through electronic range considering the importance of food studies in contemporary world.

The study of food, which has enumerable relationship with culture, investigates people's relationship with food within a range from the perspective of social science and humanities. As an interdisciplinary study in food studies, we can give an example of Krishnendu Ray's (2008) works on ethnic restaurants. He adopted the methodologies and theories from various fields such as history, business, sociology and practicing interdisciplinary food studies (cited in Miller and Deutsch, 2009, pp.3).

Food studies also share with global studies as a concern for macro – micro linkages, especially links between the large scale political and economic structures that shape global food production and more localized spheres of consumption. To define food studies is not an easy task or simply we cannot say that food studies are only about the relationship between food and human experiences. Apart from this, food studies research includes a broad gamut of topic, orientation of theories and research methodologies. Food studies are vibrantly rich and challenging topic in recent contemporary period. Food research is diverse in topic, theories and methodologies. They cover such topics as:

1. Ethnographic methods: Field study
2. History& Narrative (oral histories, documents, artifacts through studying the past)
3. Cultural/ Media studies (studying culture, media, cultural artifacts like art & literature)
4. Quantitative methods (studies carried out through people's experiments, quasi- experiments, surveys)

Thus the theoretical and methodological tools are being taken from a wide range of disciplines like the relationship of food and human experience from different approach, in a different way as people, cultures and countries are different. They consider food consumers (Indian immigrants living in Rome), food acculturation (adults' food memories of childhood), food business (Delmonico's restaurant), and food entertainers (celebrity chefs/ television hosts) (Miller and Deutsch, 2009, pp.6). Various disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, history, media studies, cultural studies, literature and

business are linked with food studies. Diversity of food studies is promoting numerous opportunities in everyday life, national and international space to define various culinary art and practices to continue the human relationship and food.

Before discussing the importance of food studies, we must confess the importance of food. Food is a part of everyday life. Food is needed for every living being and it is the primary biological drive. Food is necessary for living; we cannot think without food of our life or if we eat wrong food we cannot survive. Food business is the largest business in the world; representing 10 percent of GDP and millions of people are engaged in food business. Food is an important material as such food has tremendous cultural and symbolic importance. There are certain important symbols which are necessary to human beings to find: how food is produced, prepared, consumed and procured.

2.2.1. HISTORICAL METHODS

“A knowledge of history gives us a feeling for the possibility of change” Peter Smith (1995).

Peter Novick did commendable job in historical research. His book *That Noble Dream* (1998) focuses on “objectivity” in historical research. Novick found that objectivity in historical research is not possible as the account is not in present but in past context. To make decisions about what to include and exclude and the scantling of material put together into a fluid and cohesive narrative is a formidable task. How we get it, where and why we are today can be revealed by historical research for understanding the present. Account of historical records is added by what had happened in the past. Without knowing the past we cannot understand the present situation of our life. Historical research is important to find out the main root of culture. What human beings have taught, attempted and accomplished can be examined by studying history. History helps us to discover food choices, patterns of commensality, the gendered nature of food and other important food related issues are rooted in various cultures. Thus history is a valuable method in food

studies research. What, why, how, when and where we eat as well as with whom we eat all such valuable understandings can be gained by performing food research historically. Though history is a valuable tool but sometimes it can be misused also. For myriad reasons histories are written. To pursue a political agenda or to perpetuate old myths historical research can be used. In the political market place the images of food and issues surrounding food are potent commodities. Some of the most cherished references are food stories and folklore. The study into the future historical research needs works as a method and works as a crystal ball and it is often- cited as reason for doing historical research. History is not an accurate predictor for the future rather it looks into what has been important for societies, individuals and cultures. It is an indicator. Cultural patterns and practices are easily understandable if history offers useful insight. According to Best and Kahn, generalizations about future behaviors are very hard to make because exact combinations of circumstances and behaviors rarely recur, planning is rarely perfect, and the best- intended plans often have unforeseen consequences (1998). For better understanding of cultural patterns and practices history can do for us by offering interesting and useful insights. If one can relate the past activities to existing ones; in such case historical research can be extremely useful in placing current problems into perspective. Galgano, Arndt and Hyser give their opinion on historical research, 'as it is true of other types of research, there is a spectrum of philosophy in food studies historical research. In historical research this spectrum runs from the positivist to the historicist' (2008). For positivists history is scientific endeavour. With too many variables to pronounce any one viewpoint or narrative as accurate and objective; on the other end of the spectrum historicists feel that human societies are too complex. The novice food studies scholar working in a historical area needs to remember not to fall into the trap of presentism. Presentism is the practice of using a contemporary lens to view what has happened in the past (Galgano, Arndt and Hyser, 2008). Historical materials should not be used as today's values as well as perspectives to judge what happened in the past.

People should keep in mind two important factors while examining the evidence of food history; these are: what influences were shaping the people

and the events people are investigating. While doing historical research in food studies some important issues are to be considered. The basic important thing is that when the influences of such as religious, political, cultural, social and technological were in operation during the time period we are considering. In view of Hiestand, context will play a role in the theoretical element of historical research in food studies (1986). Galgano, Arndt and Hyser discuss, ‘when you conduct historical research in food studies, you also need to consider how theory will influence what you read, how you read it, how it will influence your final report. There are a number of theoretical approaches to historical research including causational, postdeterminist, and postmodernist’ (2008). One of the most common and widely used approaches in food studies is social history. Galgano, Arndt and Hyser (2008, pp. 13) opine that social history can be defined as “a narrative to describe the everyday lives of people”. The lives of everyday people are emphasized in present food studies research as continued interests have been focused in the food habits of people. Those who were often excluded from more traditional histories; social history provides valuable perspectives on the lives of them. Now to write social history from many perspectives as today we have copious amounts of information about consumption and preference and the status of food in the world of everyday people. In food studies, historical research is possible at different level. Best and Kahn (1998) define, historical research can be about “individual (s), idea (s), movements and/ or institutions” (pp. 77).

2.2.2. FOLKLORE AS AN APPROACH

Folklore tries to connect humanities and social sciences and also represent the subjects of both the disciplines. Folklore adds ideas to it by studying other disciplines. The methodologies and theories draw a line to understand the areas of folklore and related disciplines. Folklorist began to compose in more global and comparative research. Food study is necessary to express and shape the interaction among people. Food is the primary gift of nature and it conveys different social meanings. From socio- cultural dimension, food is a cultural, structural or semiotic construction. The study of

food is developed from a different stage with theories to challenge social relations. The folklorist approach is like an umbrella which developed theories in order to strengthen this approach in academics.

In the context of a nation's heritage food (traditional) is an important component as well as part of the folklore. Any aspect of a nation's past heritage may be recorded through folklore. Even the traditional food is also included in such a process. From birth to death food is our essential part of life. For our existence it is necessary and at other point on special occasion luxury is to be enjoyed through food. Through the folklore of any nation it has been an ever present theme and falls under the essential part of folklore studies. Food has had a defining role in the culture of a community. The national identity can be reinforced by means of traditional foods and other features based on the local cultural heritage. For such folklore memories are needed for future initiation.

As academic discipline folklore studies has a special significance. Folklore is one of important cultural aspects. There are many theorists whose impact can be seen in this academic discipline. Among them Marxist folklore theory, Gramsci's hegemony concept, psychoanalytical theory, Malinowski's functionalist school, Lévi- Strauss's structuralism are important. Relationship between Marxism and folklore is tried to find out by western Marxist. Folklore has been viewed as collective behaviour by the western Marxist. Their main aim was to oppose the dominant social order. The notion folk not only refers to the rural peasant but it includes also the urban proletarian by the Marxist folklore theory.

Another important methodological paradigm in folklore is Antonio Gramsci's "hegemony". Gramsci who was a leading Italian Marxist of the first half century later became one of the influential thinkers of cultural studies. In the folklore item there is always a political function which is hidden. According to Gramsci, "Folklore can be understood only as a reflection of the conditions of life of the people, although folklore frequently persists even after those conditions have been modified in bizarre combinations" (1999, pp. 187). He gives emphasis on knowing folklore as it gives clear picture of the world.

His “Prison Notebooks” was associated with the idea of hegemony. In the “Prison Notebooks” political essays on fascism and capitalism were written when Gramsci was in Mussolini’s jail. These are highly suggestive but frequently and radically incomplete. In Prison Notebooks hegemony is defined as coercion plus consent; the state is understood as dictatorship plus hegemony. Hegemony or domination is not natural but constructed in Gramsci’s version. It depends upon daily reinforcement, in education; work, in advertisement, in soap opera. Gramsci takes belief to be central to social reproduction and is therefore, the first Marxist properly to acknowledge the significance of popular culture and folklore. Hegemony is mediated by *Historic Bloc* or class coalition that constructs it (Ritzer; 2005, pp. 343). If hegemony rules for Gramsci, then counter hegemony must also be possible.

One of the most important approaches of studying folklore is the theory of psychoanalysis. This theory can help in studying human minds in the society as folklore is said to be the representation of human society. In different folklore items like folktales, legends, proverbs and myths, symbols are found to occur in the dreams of individuals. This is the notion of the Freudian dream theory. It is believed that through the way of folklore people express their desire, emotions or any feelings. With the help of folklore items Freud tries to find out the unconscious mind.

Bronislaw Malinowski is the father of the Functionalist approach who contributed in the development of fieldwork in anthropology. To know about social worlds often far away from home he established it and developed the field of anthropology. He focuses into sociological and psychological fields of enquiry. The cultural values can be revealed naturally by this approach. The psychology of the people under study is revealed. Modern fieldwork is a new dimension in the field of folklore introduced by Malinowski. His contribution is a transition in the field of social anthropology.

In structuralism the elements of culture is understood in terms of their relationship to a larger structure. Structuralism is anti humanist in its de-centering of human agents from the heart of inquiry. It tries to underlie all the uncovered structure that people do, think, perceive and feel. Structuralism is

largely synchronic in approach while analyzing the structure of relations. Structuralism basically concentrates on language. Ferdinand de Saussure was the pioneer of this theory. In this paradigm the meaning is generated through the rules and conventions which organize language (langue) rather than the specific uses and utterances which individual deploy in everyday life (parole). Saussure defines those signifiers (medium) and signified (meaning) as both constitute signs. In this process selection and combination of signs along the syntagmatic (linear) and paradigmatic (a field of signs) axes involve. The relationship between signifier and signified is not fixed on eternal relationship rather it is arbitrary as well as specific in historical and cultural context.

In humanities many scholars used Saussure concepts in their respective fields but Claude Lévi- Strauss spread the interest in structuralism widely. Both the pioneers critically analyzed structuralism in its development. Lévi- Strauss incorporates the ideas on myths, languages. His notion was to draw meaning from these constituent elements and to reveal their meaning from their relationship to one another. In anthropology and literary studies structuralism is known as the intense interest in cultures and texts as signifying systems. In his theory of binary opposition he describes structural similarities of specific character and plot events. In his famous work *The Raw and the Cooked* (1970) he discusses symbolic human culture itself are opposite. Even the title of the book itself implies the opposite meaning. Strauss organizes the myths into bundles of relations and among these bundle of units he tries to identify the binary oppositions. The universal symbol of the tension between civilization and nature has been viewed by Strauss in his book *The Raw and the Cooked*.

In theoretical paradigm, post modern theory is important. Michel Paul Foucault was an independent thinker of postmodern era. Foucault's writing cannot be classified as he was indifferent to the terms of postmodernism. Post structuralism came to embrace efforts and he made varied contributions. Foucault's concept of power is understandable from his early work (*Madness and Civilization* [1961], *Discipline and Punish* [1977]) and later work on sexuality and mentality. His early work, power inherits in institutions not in individual to functionalize the institutions. Foucault established modern disciplines with the principles of order and control, power and its inherent

options. Power in its own principles is not applicable so much on person as internal mechanism of individual can produce relationship. Discipline is like the abstraction of power from individual. Foucault's notions of power express the idea of disindividualization. Disindividualized power is a perception that power resides in the mechanism itself rather than in its operator. In Foucault's later work he defines that power inherited in individuals includes surveilled or punished. He expresses his idea on power that it is not renunciation of free, not transferable rights. Power is like a set of actions to perform on others actions and reactions.

Discourse analysis theory defines descriptive precision, specific meaning and it is an analytical tool. The term discourse defines multiple layers of meaning and their ability to stimulate double meaning. In anthropology discourse becomes an important marker in the volume beginning in the 1970s. The term refers to two directions in anthropology i.e. linguistic and cultural studies. Discourse refers to communication of meaning but in linguistic and cultural studies it has diverse uses. Even discourse analysis signifies several methodologies in anthropology, linguistic and cultural studies. First characteristic of discourse analysis is its 'textual orientation' (Fairclough, 1992). Analysis of discourse within text, whether written or spoken are the part of discourse analysis. Syntactic or semantic form of utterance is important for discourse analysis. The language is required to go beyond the boundaries of both. "Discourse analysis is not only interested in the formal (phonological or syntactic) aspects of discourse, or language use" (Van Dijk, 1997: pp.13-14). Rather communication of language in social and cultural context is also focused. In Cultural Studies discourse analysis is studied within global or local context to a particular area of language use. Foucault defines a discourse as follows:

We shall call discourse a group of statements in so far as they belong to the same discursive formation [...Discourse] is made up of a limited number of statements for which a group of conditions of existence can be defined. Discourse in this sense is not an ideal, timeless form [...] it is, from beginning to end, historical – a fragment of history [...] posing its own limits, its divisions, its transformations, the specific modes of its temporality (Foucault 1972: 117).

2.2.3. ORAL HISTORY AND FOOD STUDIES

For research in folklore, anthropology and history, oral history interviewing is one of the important tools. A significant intervention in methods that has enlarged the scope of history from the 1980s is oral history, best expressed by the oft-quoted work of Jan Vansina who rehabilitated the history of many African societies. It is thus imperative to engage with oral history while writing about the histories of pre-literate societies. A small preface would do justice to establish the linkage between oral history and food studies. Moyer (1999) defines oral history as, “The systematic collection of living people’s testimony and they share their own experiences”. In historical research day to day perspectives on food and eating have not been considered important in such case oral history is useful in capturing these perspectives. That is why in food studies oral history techniques (interviews are recorded in tape, digital voice recorder or digital video recording) are very useful. Researchers like Boschma, Scaia, Bonifacio and Roberts (2008) give their opinion, oral history is a good way to explore “Subjects that have not traditionally been the topics of historical investigation” (pp. 79). As they are not the topics that are traditionally investigated, everyday life is also not investigated and left out and this space is filled by generalizations that do a great deal of injustice to history as many ‘minor’ aspects are left out leading to an erasure of the past. The practice of oral history is the outcome of modern technology as generally the common people are uncaptured in previous period. This recorded video, photograph, voice are like “eye witness” to an event or phenomenon. Important topics having some significance are considered to take interview of individuals in oral history. Like the field notes the researchers archive the records of the interviews on magnetic tape, digital audio-visual format and this technique has also made oral history to be verified and thus become history proper (as verifiability, secular causation and a sense of anachronism are considered to be the three elements of historical methods). Interviews taken from individual signify its importance. At the heart of the technique is the idea of capturing voice in its nuanced expressions expressed in tones, intonations, gestures, breaks and silences (women sing *oi-nittom* or bihu songs and *bi:rik* song for seasonal festival). As eye witness record of an event,

phenomenon, or experience there is necessary to capture voice and image to give completeness. One of the products of the technological age is the practice of oral history. Usually the events of the lives of ordinary people went uncaptured, it happened prior to the proliferation of modern audio and video recording devices. Gluck and Patai (1991) point out that, “Oral history is often used in modern feminist histories because researchers see it as a valuable tool in understanding the role and perspective of women in a tradition that has customarily relied on a masculine interpretation, a trait that makes it extremely useful in food studies as well”. To provide multiple perspectives on an event or phenomenon oral history is useful as all experiences cannot be verbalized in food studies how satisfied is the guest after eating the food is a question where there is a mismatch between the answer and the gesture (In *Ali- a:ye- Li'gang* festival food is always important part and guest are served with the traditional foods. Guest expresses their own views by themselves). For future generation the stories are being preserved as well as for ongoing analysis by researchers because of the spread of oral history techniques. In view of Yow, “Oral history begins as a dialogue between two people, the interviewer and the interviewee. This interaction forms the basis of the oral history technique” (1994). As oral history is not an objective technique; this has become its strength rather than its weakness. In oral history, in- depth interview is important to explore the feelings of interviewee how they felt, reacted, viewed and thought regarding a happened situation. Yow describes, this as an explication of “multiplicities of life experiences in a total life context” (Yow, 1994, pp.24). In a situation everyone arrives with their own assumptions and influences. Things like culture, gender, race, education, class are based on such assumptions and influences. While probing into detail and emotion to acknowledge these influences as well as the facts of the situation makes the oral history a co-creation or construction between the interviewer and the interviewee. For revealing the daily life and intimate detail of ordinary people oral history is one of the best tools for food studies researchers. People have an impact on the course of history in their foodways of everyday by motives, emotions, actions, beliefs and experiences related to it. Oral history can fill many of the empty nooks and crannies created by these grand narratives, thereby serving as a counter to the hegemonic record (Boschma, Scaia, Bonifacio and Roberts,

2008). As can be understood from the above paragraph, one of the advantages of using oral history is that it has the potential to reveal a lot about many aspects that the historians have missed out. In this connection the aspect of gender and everyday life is very important since women are most visible in the aspect of processing of food and by extension authoring folklore related to food culture and also as the custodians of the culture. These are expressed in various forms like superstitions, popular sayings, ritual practices and ceremonial practices and one example across south Asia is in different communities to give salt and chilli hand to hand is regarded as transmitters of debt and ill luck. Food is not understood as something only to be consumed in the normal scientific lexicon but invested with a wide variety of meanings that are cultural and embedded. The meanings are also dynamic and thus they change, and popular culture, therefore, maps these changes that are part of the larger cultural matrix. Thus the popular culture and folk culture of the Misings reveal many aspects of the food culture that are recorded only in the songs, practices and other cultural patterns which are purely oral in nature. Thus the primacy of orality to investigate the Mising food culture is of paramount importance. It is also in tune with the recent realization in Social Sciences that even in literate society's oral cultures contain meanings that are not visible in the print and visual culture and hence being studied with vigour to investigate important problems. An example may be given of the role of rumour and communalism as rumour is a predominantly oral phenomenon. Mising treatment of rice is at a considerable distance from the prevailing rice culture and only a specialist or a keen observer who goes beyond the surface meanings by using oral history can bring about this fact.

2.3. METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF FOOD RESEARCH

Food studies are the study of people's relationships with what they eat. It runs a broad area; it includes variations in topics, research methodologies and theoretical orientations. Documents, artifacts, oral histories (histories and narrative) are important to study the past. Food has material as well as cultural

and symbolic importance. Food studies are considered to be a discipline. In contemporary food journals methodologies have been drawn from folklore-literature, economics, geography, nutrition and philosophy are included. Despite these different perspectives, approaches and issues in food studies tangential aspect to a large issue is studied.

There are stories of migration, resistance, changes and identity related to food. Human experience can focus on what is eaten, avoided, no longer or more often eaten, what is prepared and produced. Food choices (what is prepared, produced or consumed) by a people or group is the expression of ethnic or national identity. Beyond who we are, food is often politicized in the form of food protests, philosophies of eating, and socially conscious food choices to additionally express how we feel and what we want. And food can work in tandem with the spoken and written voices in order to enact a holistic representation of identity, politics and human experience (Hauck- Lawson and Deutsch, 2008, pp. 14- 15).

As food studies are an interdisciplinary study; variety of methods from diverse fields is employed. The methods are not uniform and it is based on the method applied to different topics. The fundamental principles of each topic, whether theoretical or experimental, survey area or sampling method also matters while exploring in food research as well. In certain instances methods are not only applied according to one's own use. Basically in food study scholars are vehemently using particular useful methods like data collection and dietary recall to learn what people consume. For taste preferences sensory testing is a useful method. If we observe food studies as an overview the importance of ethics and institutional approvals and literature review are important. Basically in food studies research methodologies like historical methods, ethnographic methods, narratives, quantitative methods and using physical objects are dealt with. These methods not only represent the entire field but the current research also.

In food studies methods are applied in conducting research proceed in a systematic way. Mostly researcher tries to focus motivation, meaning and context to understand individual or a group. In food research observation is

very important method which has mostly two techniques i.e. ethnography and narrative. Data collection, oral sources, historical sources, artifacts, oral history, monographs, scripts, documentations, encyclopaedia, folklore sources like proverbs, riddles, stories, myths, legends and field survey are very important. Each community has key qualities like self sufficient, homogeneity in activities, distinct from others. Sometimes community is defined as “local community” or “community of nations”. Thus food studies use synthetic methods drawn from history, anthropology and folklore and amalgamate them while using specific tools depending on situational contexts by employing methods to deal with fragmentary sources.

In food studies researchers try to observe the community whether it has common interests among the people, common locality and ecology. The structure should be uniform. Frankenberg (1966) expresses his ideas on community that the achievable things (economic, religious or whatever) there is common interest which creates the same interest among the people. The food choices, preferences, patterned, gendered nature of food are important food related issues which are basically coined out (or in food studies) by the researchers. When market places are politically captured food items are used as strong commodities. For food related images and stories, folklores are used as reference for the surrounding food.

History is rooted in the past and only can bring about the patterns of the past and also does not claim to be fully objective and therefore as a method of predicting the future is limited. Field work supplements it but the validity of such a work has to be established. And it depends on data size, the robustness of the data and reliability. Historical methods are indicator to know what has been important to society, culture and individuals. A good historical research is not a way to solve the current problem but this piece of research may provide the information that current problems can be solved based on the knowledge of past (what has and has not been successful in the past). In food studies research for different eating habits of the population matters a lot. If the size is large then it is very difficult to survey every member of the family. Under these circumstances sometimes researcher assumes that this may not be reliable. In research, reliability and validity of data are very important. The research

outcome without accuracy is assessed as not valuable. Validity is essentially a measure of quality in research (Best and Kahn, 2006). The validity determines the soundness of research. In the fieldwork, time is always important as researcher has to leave the field at a particular time. During the course of study a number of time events occur and the events are related to the outcome of the field. Internal and external validity both are important for quantitative research. Quantitative research methods in food studies are the methods that we use when we want to explain, predict, or control phenomena of interest (Gay, Mills, and Airasian, 2006). Subject is very important in conducting research. Internal validity of research depends on the subject and people. The continuation during the beginning and end of the study with people is a serious matter. If they drop during the intervention it may affect in the outcome. In addition the subject matter is very important in conducting research as it influences the direction and therefore internal validity of research depends on the subject and people. Timing is another factor as chain of events had to be placed in proper emic and etic sequence. Pre- test and post-test are important factors to score. If groups are not properly constituted at the beginning of the study it may also affect in result as group assignment is very important. Coming to qualitative research, content is another factor of research. Issues related to content may affect the internal validity of research. External validity speaks about the generalizability of results and the unique measurement and findings are important to generalize about large group of population so as to eliminate statistical error and inconsistency. In quantitative research generalizability of findings is a goal of external validity. Polgar and Thomas (1997) refer to the two types of threats to external validity as population issues and ecological issues. Generalizability of results depends on the large population taken to study so as to generate a large body of data which can only be statistically interpreted as the sample size is able to reveal consistency and not liable to any generalization. Generalizability of results depends on the large population of study. The samples taken from the large population which infers things are random to be sufficient. The sample is the mirror of large population. The sample must be accurate to represent the population to make proper inferences. In social sciences research is conducted under different circumstances and the ecology is not same for the large group of people

situated in different places. Even the condition is differing from real life. Under these circumstances what researcher finds in the field is different from real life. It is not easy to interfere what happens in the real life as what researcher finds in the field. This would make it complex to claim generalizability in significant issues. Food research depends on ecological validity of cooking; eating and processing settings and the whole process is depending on nature. Folk and popular culture is essential elements that help in reconstructing a community's ethical norms, ideas, hopes, aspirations, superstitions. Such elements reveal different facets in unique settings through different time periods and cycles. The enduring elements are part of folk culture while elements of popular culture disappear. The folk mind has natural aptitude for self expression of the folk elements which are not preserved in time due to lack of proper channel. The method here is to delieate the diverse strands and arranges them holistically to reconstruct the food culture.

2.4. INTEGRATING DIFFERENT METHODS

Food studies researchers mostly use two observational research methods and these are ethnographic and narrative. These two methods are used largely because they tell the stories of people as they share prepare and obtain food. With little modification these two methods are used in ethno-methodological studies of food. Before discussions it is important to define ethnography. The term "ethnography" is rooted in Greek. The word ethnography comes from the Greek terms *ethnekos* and *graphein*. Literarily ethnography means to write about people outside their own culture. Ethnography is a mode of study about people, culture, phenomena in a natural setting. This technique is used in the field and it is largely used to analyze culture of a group, how they share it, their behavior, beliefs, and language. Ethnography tries to deal with the fundamental aspects of human experiences. Bronislaw Malinowski one of the pioneers in this field expresses that ethnographer should interact closely with the culture in question in order to grasp the "native's point of view, his creation to life, to realize his vision of his world" (1922, pp.25).

Ethnography allows the scholar to understand people or social groups as well as to gain this group's understanding social meaning of daily activities. In a society the social groups share their behavior, manner, belief, share food and all. In the context of a larger whole most of the ethnographers are examining a specific group, situation, or phenomenon as ethnography is a holistic endeavour. In rituals and festivals people gather, prepare and share feast in a society and it is like primary activities in private and public life. Understanding this type of social behavior it can be made out from ethnographic study that this technique can provide us the deeper understanding of food habits of culture- sharing groups. Folklorist Kathy Neustadt in *Clambake* (1992) observes it in Allen's neck, Massachusetts, a small town which is 100 years old. Neustadt tries to understand how people define Clambake and people mean it after taking part in it. Using a theoretical focus, Neustadt observed the way of serving in the event to give their ethnic identity. While doing this she observed the overview history and lore of Clambake, how the working group that puts on the clambake functions, the way of changing menu, the way of maintaining the same menu, observation from preparation, ticketing, serving and cleaning up. By studying various aspects, she is able to clarify some of the meanings of Clambake in social context.

To acquire knowledge and question folklore is one of the most important fields to be studied. The society can be reflected in various forms by the representation of the cultural beliefs and values. Folklore refers to a body of material. As academic discipline it includes the customs, verbal lore, material culture that comprises the folklore discipline. Folkloric materials are sought to have empirical basis to claim about the essential character of study. Folklore approach tries to connect cultural glories with their previous period. In nationalist research, folklore is a way to give impetus and it is the preserver of oral archives for written document. Folklore partially shares institutionalized genealogy of anthropology. The verbal lore represents the lost glories of past. Nazism which is known as totalitarian ideology, folklore was employed in it to reveal the notions of national and racial purity with scientific authority. Nazism provides the example of folklore in nationalist level. The urban and industrial folklore in the United States began to gain currency by the influential work of

Alan Dundes who was a major theoretician of folklore studies. Mythological text is an important source of folklore. In academic level ongoing research is mostly global and comparative. Study of ballads and motifs trace the research to the new world. The oral tradition in folklore discipline has paved a new way in research. This tradition was influenced by a number of scholars like Vladimir Propp and Russian folklorists. The contribution of literature is very important in the study of folklore. This development is focusing on theory like genre and this development has added the perspective of folklore in broader context. Material culture is a new dimension of folklore study. It includes museum, folklore, archaeology, anthropology, history etc. The study of material culture includes a wider aspect from ritual to ordinary preparation of foods and the relationship in social context. There is a need to subject gender representation in folklore. The analysis of folkloric material from a feminist/ gender perspective help to understand how gender roles are naturalized in societies. Ethnography is another important method to carry out research. When folklore moves from one to another classification, the social structure and practice also makes distinction.

Several scientific methods were employed to explore the food areas in Assam. In most cases, quantitative research methods were applied but qualitative research methods were applied also in some cases. Data were collected as personal experience, interviews, introspection, life story, various cultural products, storytelling, narrative, observations fall within the qualitative scope of research. Researcher tried to locate the changing role of production and consumption as well as cultural beliefs and values that exist in the society. In fact this study is a triangulation of methods namely interviews, ethnography and unstructured preservation incorporated by photographs and secondary sources. Data triangulation involves more than one source, interviewer, and code or data analyst. Theoretical triangulation employs multiple theories or hypothesis to examine a phenomenon. Methodological triangulation employs and involves the use of more than one method, such as qualitative and quantitative methods. Analytical triangulation is the combination of two or more methods of analyzing data and to check the results. .

This study uses mainly primary data, but some secondary data also serve to support the empirical findings. Data were collected in two phases: in summer and winter of 2010, 2011 and summer of 2012. Data were collected from the following sources, interviews with the villagers, producers, sellers, reviews of articles published in journals, books and news papers. Also data were collected through semi structured interviews and in- depth qualitative interviews. Both were taken from among the members of two generations.

To do research in social science, fieldwork is necessary to collect first hand data from the living people about their society and life. The main aim is to collect data that help in the understanding of the issue or question of interest. Food researcher needs to do fieldwork in a naturalistic setting. It is easier to make claims of generalized notion when the work is going on in a setting that closely replicates a natural setting in the real world. In the present study a few districts of Assam where Misings live have been chosen for field study. Misings are to be found in Dhemaji, Sonitpur, Jorhat, Lakhimpur, Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sivsagar and Golaghat districts of Assam. The study is carried out by using ethnographic data which is fundamentally based on field observations and interviews were conducted in various districts of Assam particularly in Jorhat (Majuli), Dhemaji (Jonai), Lakhimpur (Dhakuakhana), Sonitpur and Kamrup (metro). The Misings are originally the hill tribes who have later migrated to the plain areas of Assam. Previously the Misings were known as *Miri* residing on the Himalayas (present Arunachal Pradesh). Being closely attached to nature, the Misings are still maintaining their tradition of life. That is the reason why their practices related to food and the ways of preparation are both natural.

In this part the focus would be on how Mising community is defining their culture within their own and in the contemporary society. How this community is looking through the lens of today's world. In the cultural context foodways is important both at the family and individual level for their identity. Like every community Mising community have passed several stages of development. Previously they were hill dwellers and later migrated to various plain areas of Assam and adopted the changes in course of time. Misings have immense relationship with nature and they use to live nearby river banks. The

reasons behind this; as the river itself is a source of various flora and fauna which attract them and river is a mode of transportation led to the selection. For agricultural lands the river bank is chosen because of the availability of fertility. But now river has become a force of destabilization. The erosion created by flood has become a source of agony. That is why now they live far away from river as ecological changes are happening. Agricultural production now is transferred from *jhum* to settled cultivation. Urbanization has become another problem as some people cannot cope up with it and leave for other non-urbanized areas. If we analyze the Misings from the point of view of social interaction, their physical mobility seems to be a problem for the traditional community. The mobility has led to increase the interaction with the other communities which are prone to the world changes. The ethnic traditional group bears the qualities with difficulties to adopt the culture of others while maintaining their own too. In the contemporary world Misings have one finest example of their acceptance quality. Though they have their own traditional attire, they have adopted the Assamese *mekhela sador*. They weave the *mekhela sador* with their traditional designs which is known in the market as “*Mising mekhela sador*”. The example provides us with the assimilative attitudes of the Misings in the contemporary world by keeping their own ethnic identity too.

2.5. FOOD VIS-À-VIS HEALTH AND NUTRITION

Historians who are working on food try to explain the importance of food studies. The explanation is necessary for the historians as the concept of food and opinions to define food is not uniform rather it is different. In scholarly definition the notion of food is very artistically used; on the contrary the opinion of common people is easily understandable to all. In simple term food means nourishing substance which people consume to promote growth and to sustain life. In food studies research, it focuses on dynamic themes by not only studying on food itself; rather it studies the relationship between food and the human experience. Thus human life has different concepts as food plays an important role in their lives. Food is the mediator between nature and

cultural world; it is one of the important cultural symbols. From historical perspective the relationship between food and human experience is new as the historians never cover the hidden layers of meaning in social relationship. Thus food research has become new understanding of social relations and cultural metaphor which human beings experience. Food is always an essential part of human society and people also experience it in different ways in everyday life. In the study of food from the times of engagement of animals in agriculture; historians have been exploring the various dimensions of food for its entry into the field of study in social sciences. In the field of science study on food, the scientists work in laboratory to find the nutritional level and food value. Scientists give importance in the nutrition of food and they concentrate on diet and prepare diet charts. In National Institute of Nutrition, Food Engineering and Technology and Department of Food Science studies on food are being done in a scientific way. Basically they concentrate on food industry, its engineering and technological development, diet, health and manufacturing food products. Study of history of food is of important in social sciences. The legitimacy of food helps to grow the study of food and it becomes a broad field of study for various disciplines. Annals E.S.C. publish a series of articles on food and nutrition. An occasional best seller that drew an immediate and widespread following is Alfred Crosby's *The Columbian Exchange* to gather strength and momentum to create the history of food. Such literature helps us to recognize food as an important field of study. The field of food research is growing, criss cross study in the comprehensive of time, space, race, class and society and culture to interpret the meaning of food is not an easy task. In social sciences food studies include the observations, interviews as an important method and these methods are important for opinions of people as well as for people's perception. Food culture gives a direction and contextual richness to studies of diet, health, cooking, manners, social structure, food diffusion, production and distribution and much more.

In Mising community people prefer healthy eating and to effectively promote the growth of people. Perceptions of healthy eating are needed to understand two factors; firstly, factors that influence the eating behaviors and secondly, factors that influence people's eating habits. Misings are very unique

in its cultural life and their food habit is unique because of its relation with nature (they are mainly depending on nature). The symbolic representation of food in Mising community is always significant. As Mising community is migrating from various places it is noticed that they have the capacity to adopt other culture also. They maintain their own culture and also accept culture of others very easily. After migration change in ecology is very distinct but their pattern of adaptation is considerable. It is very interesting that they have been maintaining their traditional dress code and their production is famous and have already captured the market with the brand of '*Miri Mekhela Sador*'. This example has proved that their culture is assimilating with local dominant culture. As it is already mentioned that food is a symbolic representation therefore in every community there are food related cultural practices. Mising community is not exceptional in this case. In Mising community food is an identity, process and cultural construction. Food as a metaphoric term; it conveys different meanings to mediate between nature and culture. The relation of nature and culture reveals universality in human thinking. Food as a prime factor of life is very important to prepare and manage food in everyday life. In most of our societies, women become primary actors to carry out the responsibility to manage and prepare food and to continue the traditional cultural practices. These practices reflect values and beliefs of a community. Basically on the basis of food choice perceptions of healthy eating are constructed. To identify the knowledge regarding food this perception is important. Concepts were found out that healthy eating in Mising community is important as people have consistently recognized their eating habits as balanced, nutritious and full of variety and food values. In their diet mostly they consume medicinal plants and for that mostly they are dependent on forest resources. Local communities of northeast India are extremely knowledgeable about the local plant resources and their utilization (Sarmah, 2006, 2010; Sarmah *et al.*, 2006). Livelihood system of Mising community is focusing their knowledge on health practices and their knowledge on utilising on local plants. Based on their perception from the field it is revealed that they are still maintaining their method of food preparation. Even they cure some diseases by first hand treatment done at home. For example, malaria, small pox, skin diseases, diarrhea, vomiting, cough, gastric, blood purification, urinary

discharge, jaundice, dysentery, fever, bronchitis, stomach disorder, blood pressure, nerves, menstruation problem, asthma, epilepsy diseases are cured by medicinal plants. For cuts, burns also they use ornamental plants like *chalkunwuri* (alovera). For de- worming *bet* (rattan shoot) is used as medicine. Even in accidental case like broken fracture they prefer *herhurua lata* (*Cissus quadrangula* L) as a fast track relief. For burning sensation and redness of eyes the leaves of *doron* is used. Thus the perceptions of people found relatively homogenous in different field. In general, people's perceptions on healthy eating are prevailing in Mising community from generation to generation as people of different age groups have the knowledge of traditional medicine. People's perceptions are focused by following points:

- (a) The age of the respondents are not uniform; marital status
- (b) Education, income of the family
- (c) Gender stratified and their related beliefs

Misings are basically agriculturalists and most of their income comes from paddy field. In every society economy matters a lot. Thus education is interrelated with economy. It is hard to educate if the economy is poor. The social background of any community is determined by the economy. In order to survive people frame some kind of psychology to adapt with society is necessary. In the socialization process self knowledge is very important and the value represents the constant notion towards self representation. People's perception is very important to find how self knowledge unfolds. People's perception can be studied by self perception theory which is very essential to know people's own attitudes, behaviours and other internal states. People's behavior and circumstances are important for their own beliefs and attitudes to infer.

Studies help to find the scope, style and utility of the food habits of the Mising people. Literature of food studies has developed the accurate connection of food and foodways. The study is based on fieldwork and data have been collected from field based on observation and interview methods. The interviews were taken to focus the food habits based on the fieldwork of Baligaon village which is 35 km from Tezpur town of Sonitpur district of

Assam. There are 58 families and total population consists of 2000. The male and female ratio is 50:52. Literacy rate of Baligaon is 50% and total employed person is fifteen. The field was visited several times in 2010- 2011. Research was conducted among different age group of people. The historical and cultural connection in that society was tried to locate. The Mising community is very immensely connected with nature. To collect data there was a need to observe the significant practices related to food habits and food practices. The women are too busy in their daily activities therefore it was quite difficult to take time from them. Interviews were taken to know their feelings and experiences from their own point of view. To make the present study useful and authentic, attention was given to special case studies to focus on nutritional food value of Mising community. During the field work special attention was paid to observation, which is a reliable technique for proper understanding of the society. The respondents were given every freedom to narrate incidents and their feelings. It was a matter of pleasure that inspite of daily busy schedule, the respondents eagerly participated in discussions. It was found that respondents were proud of being Misings and they were very much conscious about their culture and identity.

Case Study 1: Name- Mrs. Dipali Mili, Firiti Mili, Senu Mili

Age: 30- 35 years, Profession: Home maker, Income: Agriculture, Village: Balipara.

They reveal a number of points on nutritional support of Mising food. They gave preference to boiled foods which gives more nutrition and use of oil is very less in their dishes. They are having depth idea on foods particularly on the ante natal and post natal period foods. After delivery mother is suggested to have chicken soup which is prepared with *Bihlangani* leaves (a kind of medicinal plant). *Kochu* or *Ange* (taro, botanical name is *Alocasia acuminata schott*) which is a very common food among Mising society. Girls during puberty period should restrain from taking certain food such as pineapple, banana flower. *Bihlangani* (a kind of fern) leaves are used as medicine for rheumatic pain. Generally they eat shoots, leaves and tubers cooked with acidic

fruits like *owetenga* (elephant apple), *bilahi* (tomato) and *nemu tenga* (lemon). It is useful for blood purification also.

Case Study 2: Name: Mrs. Anita Mili, Profession: Home maker, Age: 37 Years, Income: Agriculture, Village: Balipara.

In the fifth month of the pregnancy period of a woman, traditionally *pajap* (duck meat) must be provided with by her parents. There is a strong belief that if the pregnant lady does not eat *pajap* then her baby might be physically handicapped after birth. The meat of pigeon and *phapuk* (banana flower) are essential not only for female but men too as these increase blood. Spadin of Banana is used as medicine for the treatment of eating hair accidentally with food as sometimes one/two hair may be left inside stomach. Therefore, *Spadin of Banana* should be eaten at least one/ two time a year. Even *phapuk* (Spadin of Banana) with pigeon meat is also a nutritious food as it improves blood.

Case Study 3: Name: Shri Najiram Mili, Profession: Agriculturalist, Age: 45 years, Income: Agriculture, Village: Baligaon

Shri Mili who is an inhabitant of Baligaon village gave opinion in support of the nutritional food value of *apong* (rice beer). It is useful for urine as well as for gall bladder problems. If the amount of alkali is more it helps to dissolve stone. It has nutritional as well as medicinal value. Gastric problem can be solved by consuming it early in the morning in empty stomach. Even the formation of stone in kidney can be prevented by having *po:ro apong*. Misings consider *apong* as physical labour tonic and refreshment.

Case Study 4: Name: Kommission Mili, Profession: Social worker, Age: 72 years, Income: Business and agriculture, Village: Baligaon

Shri Mili is an active member and famous as a social worker. People from Assam, across the country and outsiders have been visiting his home and he maintains a diary where his guests have left comments on Mising traditional food. According to him Mising foods are source of vitamins, minerals and fibre. They prefer boiled food with local herbs like medicinal creeper used in curries *vedailata* (*Paederia foetida* L), *dimoru* (*Ficus glomerata* Roxb), *hati-*

Khutora (*Amaranthus spinosus* L.), *nefaju* (*Clerodendrum cloebrookianum* L.), *tenga mora* (*Hibiscus Suddarifa* L.), *mosundori* (*Houttuynia cordata* Thunb) and species of fern used *dhekia* (*fiddlehead fern*) which is nutritious and useful for health. The juice of *vedailata* works as astringent and particularly they use it in diarrhea and dysentery. Use of less oil, less oily food is useful for health. Diseases like gastric is very less compared to other dominant community. In their traditional recipes green spinach and herbs are used to reduce fat.

In northeast region of India the tribal's use different plants and plants products. The traditional knowledge of particular community includes health care, natural resource management and food security particularly in rural areas. From the above discussion it is important to reveal how food practices and health are complex cultural construction. The reference to a variety of health messages, experiences and food choices help others to follow a healthy diet. To understand people and cultures and for applied reasons such as providing culturally appropriate and effective health care and advice; beliefs about food and health are important. Apart from the case studies there are many examples which enable us in understanding Mising community especially the uses of medicinal plants in their life. Diseases are cured by various medicinal plants available in nearby area. The natural herbal drugs are used both in traditional and modern society. The uses of these herbs originated from folklore and rituals. The use of herbs indicates that Mising community has connection with environment which reflects very old interaction. The discussion has revealed that the food is market oriented and impact of market is a new trend in remote areas. Gradually traditional oils and fats failed to satisfy the new hunger of industry and people. It is also noticed that some scarcity of sources are due to migration of people from remotest area to urban and metro hubs. The newly emergence of cooking and the complex relationships associated with food reveal the continuous contact with non- tribal Assamese and connection with market. In the early period, food structure mark the identity and symbolic meaning of expressing thought. Gradually with the time the discussions were not concise within a narrow sphere rather it includes the types of food, methods of preparation, dining room, and kitchen helps to explore the relationship between social group and food. It was possible for them to prepare recipes

without some ingredients such as oil in early days but now a day it is difficult to do without it. Respondents are in favour of cultural change for the taste and some are for the development of Mising community. In the cultural market, society tries to meet the other internal needs. Changes have become visible in the context of methods of preparation and consumption of food. Homogenization of eating and practices is gradually disappearing from their society among the present generation. The respondents think that industrialization and commercialization of food have decreased the importance of traditional food. That is why foodways are changing; even the relationship between food and society is also changing as well as the perceptions too. Even in earlier period while migrating from hill to plain areas, changes in foodways process was visible to find or create a vision of the past to make senses.

If we look at food studies it is interdisciplinary in subject matter as well as the theoretical and analytical approaches are also different. Food studies are as diverse as food itself. That is why there is importance of theoretical orientation and methodologies. Food has not only material importance but it has cultural and symbolic importance too. Therefore we cannot deny the importance of food studies. Food as a methodological tool paves the way to share stories of migration and works as evidence to find out how society has been changing, it is an expression of personal identity, ethnic identity. While discussing food and memory oral history is important in reaching ethnic history. This is an important source to know people's memory or observation of the past and it can be established by oral history. To do research in ethnic history this method is useful by using interview technique. In food studies historical research is a positivist spectrum. Through historical methods researcher in food studies can predict about their future based on the past. Positivist see history as scientific endeavour therefore theoretical approach is important. The use of lens to focus on gender, race and ethnicity, class theories like post- modernism emphasize on using such methods.



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5 *(Photography by Yamini Gogoi)*



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11