

CHAPTER FIVE

FOOD AND THE INDIAN DIASPORA

Introduction

Any attempt to present a comprehensive study of the diaspora in particular, and literary food studies in India in general, will be doomed to remain incomplete without a study of its relation to food. This is because for the Indian diaspora, food and cuisine are intimate matters and as Krishnendu Ray says, “cuisine like religion, is one of the sites where the migrant turns away hesitatingly from the embrace of the metropole” (K. Ray 1), or the hostland. Food is a vital carrier of culture, and the rhetoric of food in the works of the Indian diaspora, constitutes a major discourse whereby the complex diasporic experiences and dilemmas can be critiqued. The diaspora understands “food as a portal” through which their ethnicity, tradition and culture can be kept alive, via their attempts to cook and eat familiar dishes (R. Das 2). Food critics like Anita Mannur, views food as an “emotional anchor”, while Emma-Jayne Abbots, talks about the ability of food to create “new subjectivities and orientations” (Mannur 27; Abbots 117).

The attempt at feeding of past memories by cooking familiar foods is a common trope in the works of Indian diaspora which urges one to examine the diaspora’s daily existence, and their deep connection to food and culture. To achieve my purpose, the novels – *River of Smoke*, *Flood of Fire*, *The Inheritance of Loss*, *Fasting, Feasting* and *The God of Small Things* will be analysed, through a food-centric focus and the exercise of close reading. The chapter would delve into a study of the gastronomic boundaries, dietetic and personal hybridisation, and a suspended state of liminality, in which the Indian diaspora is perpetually bound. The chapter will also deal with the issues of nostalgia, culture shocks, struggles of assimilation and the fluidity of identities through the interrelated ideas of culinary recreation, culinary “interorientation” (Bakhtin 317) and “culinary citizenship” (Mannur 20). The chapter would examine the formation of creole dishes and hybrid dishes, and the hybridisation of etiquettes and customs among the diaspora. The chapter will also focus on the unregistered experiences and subjectivities of the underprivileged members of the Indian diaspora, such as those working in the kitchens of multicultural restaurants. It will study the complexities involved in the diaspora’s return

to the homeland. Additionally, the chapter would analyse the trope of consumption itself, not only in its literal sense, but also in its metaphorical signification.

However, while we study the food habits of the Indian diaspora and their attempts at culinary demarcation, it should be noted that migrant foodways are “not produced in isolation but are interwoven with that of the host country” (Abbots 118). While one’s palate might be most resistant to changes, it is also the area where initial contacts with foreign bodies are identified. Thus, studying this alimentary zone promises to yield answers to certain critical questions and also present some new discoveries and interpretations that may have been disregarded due to the former notion of studying food as an insignificant endeavour.

The Formation of the Indian Diaspora

Diasporas are common to every part of the world as a chunk of population who has settled in one locale but trace their origin in some other countries and continue to maintain that relationship. It is also reinforced by the fact that they never “return to their homeland (real or imagined)” (V. Mishra 2). Initially applied to the Jews, way back in the sixth century BC (3 Arnold Ages), the word diaspora is a heavily contested one, derived from the verb ‘diaspeirō’ which means ‘to scatter across’. Rogers Brubaker explains that, the word typically referred to the case of the captive Jewish migrants during the Babylonian exile (Brubaker 2). Since then, the word has experienced a constant modification and expansion of meaning, as necessitated by the dynamic shifts in history, society and culture. In this the journey remains an overriding constant, and although journeys were earlier linear, they have now become increasingly non-linear with the ease of transport. The flexible nature of the word lends it the ability to simultaneously encompass many contradictory concepts from colonialism to exile, nationalism to expatriation, slavery to human rights and so on. Therefore, it becomes difficult to put forward a proper definition of the diaspora, as every case appears to be markedly different and therefore equally problematic (Pande 59). For instance, the colonisers were also a diasporic community in their colonies, as well as the transported migrants, being the subjects of colonial domination– the only difference being that of power control. Apart from this, migrants are also psychologically impacted by the conditions under which voluntary or involuntary migration is undertaken. They strive to settle in a new land willingly, or by force, and in the process create new narratives of “real or imagined displacements” (V. Mishra 1), haunted by the sense of nostalgia and

rootlessness, and the overwhelming difficulties of assimilation, added by the endless conflicts that they must face, or those they themselves give birth to in the process. In essence, the major characteristics of the diaspora consist of cross-border migration and overseas settlement; engagement in the host land economy; an overwhelming homeland consciousness which includes both homesickness and also the feeling of homelessness; and the construction of a multi-locational or even a global self. (Pande 59-60)

However, the creation of the Indian diaspora is a highly complicated phenomenon, as induced by the extended admixture of several complex and mostly interlinked, historical and socio-economic factors. While the colonisers became the ruling class despite being diasporic, migrants from the third world countries as India, remained the marginalised ones. The constant racism that the third world diaspora faced, and is yet facing, gave birth to a world of re-imagination and re-construction of cultures and identities. In the case of the Indian diaspora, groups can be both “old” and “new” (V. Mishra 2), overlapping each other in terms of phases and generations. The journey of Indians dates back to the ancient and medieval times whereby people such as monks, priests, political ambassadors and traders travelled to other parts of the world. Parts of South East Asia, Central Asia, China, Korea, Japan were all more or less influenced by Indian visionaries and their unique aesthetic, literary and spiritual ideas. But the early emigrations never generally resulted in any permanent settlements and there came a time when travelling overseas were looked upon with contempt and the travellers ostracised.

However, the nineteenth century was a period of immense human journey and displacements, as effected by the “unique blending of commercial interests and political power” (A.K. Mishra 230). In order to facilitate the progress of the newly evolving empire, “political economies were refashioned, social ties rent and rearranged, and people moved from areas of supply to areas of demand” (Wolf 355). On the other hand, industrialisation and capitalism generated artificial poverty and artificial famines, thereby enforcing many Indians to embrace an uncertain future in an unknown land. Thus, colonial India witnessed a vast efflux of labourers as a number of people embarked on the novel but perilous journey of overseas migration, by agreeing to become indentured labourers, as introduced by the East Indian Company. It remains one of the major reasons of migration with the highest number of Indian migrants.

Additionally, the overwhelming political and economic crises created some irreversible boundaries among the Indian middle class as well. The newly educated, self-fashioned bourgeoisie, understood that “despite their qualifications, they would always remain marginalised in the administrative structure of the colonial state” (U. Ray 4). However, their formal education opened up a vast number of possibilities, including the discourses of self-determination, rights and freedom. Their pursuit of new opportunities in foreign lands was also influenced by the dilemmas they faced at home, being torn between the pressures of authority and the heartfelt need to assert their individuality, issues which in turn contributed to their divided existence. Many Indian intellectuals and skilled workers thus opted for voluntary migration in search of better prospects and to further hone their skills. While almost all the cases of migration were mediated by a desire to overcome the present existential dilemmas, the history of labour migration was specifically mediated by the very colonial desire to cultivate and capitalise sugar and spice. However, be their migration voluntary or forced, the Indian diaspora is constantly oppressed under the burden of their colonial baggage.

(a) Phases of Emigration and its Background

Indian overseas journey can be divided into five major patterns of flow as chalked out by Prakash C. Jain: “(1) Indentured labour emigration, (2) *kangani/ maistry* labour emigration, (3) "Free" or "Passage" emigration, (4) "Brain-drain", or voluntary emigration to the metropolitan countries of Europe, North America and Oceania, and (5) Labour emigration to West Asia” (161). Added to these was the category of convicts, mostly those who participated in the Revolt of 1857, who were shipped to distant colonies to serve their terms.

Among the above-mentioned emigration patterns, the indentured labour system created a booming increase in Indian emigration in the form of poor and gullible labourers from famine and drought-stricken parts of India, such as Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Bihar. The abolition of slavery on 1833, by Britain and by other colonial powers such as France, the Netherlands and Portugal, created a shortage of workers in the plantation estates of sugar, rubber and so on. Consequently, it has resulted in the strategic adoption of the indentured labour system, as inspired by the Latin American and Cuban colonists, who used to import Chinese indentured labour from the Portuguese settlement of Macao (P.C. Jain 155). Contemporary circumstances presented the East India Company with a

lucrative chance to supply vast numbers of manpower, from India. It was an arrangement of bonded labour whereby the labourers were made to sign contracts for working at overseas plantation areas for at least five years or seven years under specific wages and other provisions. After its termination, they would have the option to stay back and purchase land. They can also return to India, with the passage paid for by their employers, provided they have completed ten years of industrial residence in the islands (A. Kumar 41). Colleen Taylor Sen's book *Feasts and Fasts* estimates that around 1.4 million Indians left their homes between 1834 to 1917 (end of indentured labour emigration), to join the plantation works in Guyana, Trinidad, Jamaica, Mauritius, Fiji, to mention a few.

The second flow pattern is the contract labour or *kangani* and *maistry* emigration which began in the first and third quarter of the nineteenth century, to supply South Indian labour to Malaysia, Sri Lanka and Burma, respectively. It was different from the indentured system in the sense that the labourers were free from any contracts or fixed periods of servitude and that family recruitment was permitted. It is said to end in the early 20th century and the actual number of migrants moving to and forth, under this system is probably ten million (P.C. Jain 162).

The third flow pattern was Passage emigration during and after the Second World War, mostly of the trading classes from Gujarat and Punjab, to African countries under the British Empire, such as South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. Many such immigrant merchants flourished in these countries. The number of such immigrants increased to around 372,000 during the war, but growing political unrest reduced the number since the mid-sixties (P.C. Jain 163).

Following the Second World War, the mid 20th C saw a steep rise in voluntary Indian migration to the advanced and rapidly growing industrialised countries of Europe and North America. liberal immigration laws resulted in the migration of skilled and semi-skilled labourers and intellectuals which created a steady flow of "brain-drain" from numerous parts of India, thus forming the fourth category of migration. These migrants mostly settled down in Britain, Canada and the U.S. and other European countries (P.C. Jain 157).

Also, the oil boom during the 1980s resulted in the recent Labour emigration to West Asia, which forms the fifth category of migration. In the fifth category migrants are

hired for contractual works and are generally not allowed to stay back and settle after its completion. The fluctuating nature of the labour market in West Asia results in an admixture of skill composition and the number of immigrants required also varies. Nevertheless, this form of migration has resulted in a significant number of NRIs, although there are no permanent settlers (Pande 62). People from Kerala constitute the major number of such immigrants (P.C Jain 163-164).

Apart from the above-mentioned categories, there is also the conflicting category of the political diaspora which includes the Sikhs, the Kashmiris, the Naxalites. Another category which has become trendy in the recent years is that of the Indian Student Migration to other developed nations for higher education. It has also led to significant overseas settlement (Pande 62-63).

Since then, the Indian diaspora has extended into many generations, with some of them even choosing to become twice migrants or twice displaced. It further complicated the idea of homeland and identity, as it turned to homelands and multiple splits occurred in their identities. Observing the far-flung migrant outflow and the varied pattern of its diaspora, the High Level Committee on Indian Diaspora in the year of 2001, defined the Indian diaspora as “a generic term used for addressing people who have migrated from the territories that are currently within the borders of the Republic of India” (qtd. in Pande 60). The definition of the Indian diaspora has presently transformed from diversity to plurality, with writers like Gurharpal Singh (2005) and later Jasbir Jain (2017) trying to describe the coexistent multiplicity of the Indian diaspora, thereby broadening its domain of discussion. The “plurality” (J. Jain 23; Singh 5) of the Indian diaspora becomes a phenomenon which remains a major determining factor of the migrants’ lives, their experiences of assimilation and participation in the host land sociopolitics. Besides, the long-drawn history of colonialism has, as already mentioned, profoundly impacted the Indian history and its consciousness, which in turn further complicates the nature, consciousness, and experiences of the Indian diaspora.

(b) Indentureship and the Early Overseas Settlements

The experiences of the labour emigrants, such as the indentured, *kangani* and *maistry* labourers, have remained mostly unregistered. They were at the forefront of imperial profiteering, as they facilitated a massive amount of cheap labour. Conceptualised upon

the “debris of slavery” (A.K. Mishra 229), although the term ‘servitude’ was professed to be voluntary, there has been little difference from slavery, save some technical dissimilarities. First of all, there have been complex circumstances such as loss of jobs, poverty, inability to repay debts, uncertainty of future, and the unbearable pangs of hunger – which emotionally forced vast number of people to sign such contracts in spite of the risks and indefinites involved. Additionally, there were also severe malpractices involved during the recruitment processes such as kidnapping, deception, trafficking, which further corrupted the system. The recruited labourers included majority of Hindus and a few Muslims (C.T Sen 292). Many of the labourers were kidnapped and forcefully entered into this contractual servitude (A. Kumar 42). There were women workers too; some accompanied their husbands, while others were widows, victims of miserable marriages and also a few escapists.

With the commencement of the long journey, the capitalist machinery i.e. the ship, turned into a ‘third space’ for the migrants, a space of in-betweenness and of becoming, whereby caste boundaries were shed off and new solidarities constructed as *jahaji-bhais* and *jahaji-behans*. Ashutosh Kumar’s article shows how the ship was an intensely charged political space, “through which colonial politics and gustemic identities were negotiated” (A. Kumar 41). It is interesting to see that the caste restrictions which were the basic essence of their social lives could be broken only with the tool of food, as the ships only provided common meals and a communal dining facility. The ship also revealed the limitations of colonial domination in the matters of food, health, and taste, as it was something which they cannot anglicise or uniformise. There was the danger of indigestion and even mortality, if heavy changes were made to the diets of the migrants, who were generally used to scanty diets. Thus, native foods remained central to their diets and gradually it became closely attached to their sense of identities. Although this dietary conservation may well have been a colonial apparatus for controlling the migrant psychology, it did reflect the “dietary victory” on part of the emigrants as their tastes and religious beliefs were considered (A. Kumar 48).

In the plantation colonies the Indian immigrants were strictly controlled by the planters and were both racially and economically victimised. They were derogatorily termed as ‘coolies’ or ‘coolie slaves’ and were continuously exploited and overworked. A.K. Mishra in his paper discusses the constricting condition of the migrants such as,

“labourers’ movement off the plantation sites was severely curtailed, decisions about the work pattern, working hours, settlement, etc. were made without any consideration for the traditions of labourers, and absenteeism from work for whatever reason was severely punished by double-cut of wages and/or imprisonment” (A.K. Mishra 233).

Mishra further explains that the planters wanted to ensure maximum returns for their huge investments and also a steady presence of the labour force, which made them enforce these drastic working conditions as mentioned above. Such horrific rules and regulations served to characterise the indentured system as a highly subtle form of slavery, a type of “labour servitude” (A.K. Mishra 250), which ensured the continued exploitation of the Indian labourers typically as “an instrument of production” (qtd. in Pande 61). Another interesting fact is that, the indentured labourers were allowed to practice their respective religions unlike the African slaves, and as such were accompanied by a few Brahmin priests and imams. However, this provision as a matter of fact, facilitated further exploitation by the ruling classes in the manner of religious discrimination.

Female labourers faced multiple victimisations in the plantation colonies as they had to bear not only the unjust pressures of plantation lives, but also the pains of economic and physical exploitation, due to their lack of civil and political rights (A.K. Mishra 233-234; Pande, *Women* 1). They also had to shoulder the responsibility of recreating their traditional modes of living in the alien atmosphere, “often riddled with the politics of race and culture” (Pande 63). Their specific troubles remain uncharted under general perceptions as they largely migrated “within the framework of patriarchy and cultural considerations” (Pande 63). While migration discourse ignored the agency of women among the Indian diaspora, recent works like that of Amba Pande, has brought to light the uniqueness of their experiences in the foreign settings. Many such women exhibited leadership qualities, as life in a new land presented them opportunities to become self-dependent and “redefine roles and perceptions of the self”.

After the completion of their tenure, some labourers settled down in these colonies, while others sought to renew their tenures. Those immigrants who permanently settled down in the plantation colonies are generally grouped as the ‘old diaspora’. It should be noted here that other South Asian migrants during that period, such as the Pakistani, Bangladeshi and so on, generically used the term “Indian” to identify themselves. A few of them thereafter achieved remarkable success and enjoyed superior status in their

adopted societies. Therefore, the story of these migrants becomes a perfect example of “human triumph against extreme adversities” (Pande 61). However their agony on one hand as compared to their successes on the other, have led to numerous debates among scholars regarding the nature of labour organisation (A.K. Mishra 234).

Nevertheless, the compulsive factors and traumas behind the history of immigration are mostly ignored in favour of tangible facts and figures. Rather these narratives are circulated through the likes of historical fiction, personal records and autobiographies, which attempt to reveal the other side of the narrative- those which otherwise remain unaccounted for. But even such attempts are invariably coloured by the passage of time and personal prejudice. The likes of historical fiction where tangible facts are coupled with imagination seem to be the best supplement to salvage such situation. For instance, Amitav Ghosh’s *Ibis* trilogy, combines the facts of history with ethnography and colours it with his sheer imagination to depict the great opium wars between British India and China. In between he presents striking details of the trafficking of the miserable plantation labourers to Mauritius and the difficult circumstances under which they embraced and continued their contractual servitude.

(c) The Postcolonial Indian Diaspora

Even after independence, the scenario of migration and its reasons has hardly changed. The continued presence of western neo colonialism, added to by the persistent economic inequalities such as low levels of employment and income as well as contemporary pressures of capitalism has ensured the continuation of “Brain-Drain”. As such, Indian intellectuals, highly skilled professionals continue to journey towards developed nations, on scholarship or job offers. Earlier such migrations were UK-centric, but the liberal immigration regime during the mid-1960s deviated its direction to the US too. While migration is undertaken with the hope of better living prospects, and immigration has indeed presented many new opportunities, the immigrants however have been a constant topic of negative criticism, and political debates. Their position apart from a few exceptions remains essentially subordinate. Their daily lives are mostly fraught with racial discrimination, anti-immigrant sentiments and xenophobia. As for their engagement in foreign economy, it is as P.C. Jain rightly points out:

Indian immigrants, however, were welcome only in subservient economic roles – roles which the natives as well as the white colonists could not perform. Whenever Indians tried to compete with whites, as within trading activities or government services, attempts were made to block their progress. It was for this reason that labour immigration was encouraged, while passage immigration was usually resented. (P.C. Jain 165)

The situation is rendered more complicated with the colonialist tendency to perceive the Indian immigrants on the basis of superficial features like that of skin colour and sex, while decidedly ignoring the nuances of their conflicted identities. While their consciousness of identity gets disoriented with their journey, the rampant racism ensures that they're invariably looked down with distaste and suspicion, the very moment they enter the foreign land. Kiran Desai's novel *The Inheritance of Loss* depicts the horrible conditions of third-world labourers in the multiculturalist food business of America, which is marked by oppression, exploitation and stagnancy.

On the other hand, one's acceptance in the adopted land is also based upon one's ability to "adjust as well as assert" (J. Jain 26). However, this has never been a smooth process. Added to their colonial baggage is the concept of margins or boundaries constructed back at home, which becomes more prominent yet artificial, as the Indian diaspora begins to settle down. Attempts to continue the cultural norms are reduced to faint and fragmented remnants of their early lives in India. Yet the desire to maintain boundaries and preserve cultural values, has in some instances led to the creation of exclusive groups. For instance, among the labour immigrants, one can notice the evolution of "Little Indias" bearing their own sociocultural distinctiveness (Pande 61), which is nevertheless influenced by local conditions. Interestingly, the recreation of 'mini Indias' also explicates the fact that even the diasporic Indians 'othered' the natives and harped on a sense of superiority, as they negotiated the triangularity between the natives and the colonisers. Alternatively, we may term this as mother culture fixation as recent history suggests that instead of bonding over a mutual nationality, attention is given to the nurturance of individual and religious identities, mostly based upon the country of origin (J. Jain 85).

The diaspora's return to the homeland is no easier. The physical act of return is a seemingly simple one, but it is laden with intrinsic complexities which crop up every now and then to demonstrate the essential fact that even a complete return is unfeasible. The

most obvious reasons are as Jasbir Jain remarks, “time does not stand still, the past is only a memory and values back home have also changed”, which shatter the diaspora’s constructed idea of an ideal homeland (J. Jain 49). It results in double estrangement, this time in one’s native land, as the foreign returned individual is caught in a clash between his own expectations and memories of home; as opposed to the expectation or even indifference of his family members at home. Double estrangement further pushes one to the path of reverse nostalgia, in many cases, for the adopted land (J. Jain 87). This reversed nostalgia is also conditioned by the lingering fear of homeland eccentricities. This is also known as the “Naipaulian fear of India”, which is marked by “distrust and uncertainty, the preconceived notions of loss and of being defrauded by Indians” (J. Jain 87). It results in the inevitable ‘othering’ of one’s homeland. Thus, the diasporic hybridity becomes even more pronounced with attempts to find a rooting among the narratives of home and abroad. Trapped in a never-ending cycle of estrangement, the diaspora draws sustenance from their personal memories, which become overworked and distorted with time. As Salman Rushdie writes in *Midnight’s Children*, “memory has its own special kind. It selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimizes, glorifies, and vilifies also; but in the end it creates its own reality” (Rushdie 292).

On the other hand, there are also complexities involved in the way the native Indians perceive their diasporic counterparts. In the article “Approaches to food and Migration: Rootedness, Being and Belonging”, Abbots stresses that migrants’ food practices are not only influenced by the home but they also influence and change food practices at home (116). This issue would be further discussed in the analysis of *The God of Small Things*, that represent the attempts on the part of the natives like Mammachi, to not only impress ‘the other’ such as Margaret and Sophie Mol, but also to consume them and their culture by adopting English way of eating while living in India.

The Journey of Indian Food: From Assimilation to Commodification

As Indians travelled so did their food and culinary processes. In all cases of migration, food remains one of the most common and important tools for the double-edged task of assimilation and categorisation. This is because no matter how much an individual appears to be successfully assimilated, foodways always remains as an ever-present site of identity negotiation. It serves as an area to assay the reproduction of culture and national identity. Thus, preservation of the memory and the self is attempted by vehemently guarding meals

from foreign intrusion. They also attempt to achieve ‘culinary authenticity’ by trying to re-create and preserve the exact taste of home, and engage in the mythic and mystical representation of their ethnic cuisine. However culinary authenticity remains a problematic endeavour. The numerous variations among regional tastes come into conflict, as each subgroup of the Indian diaspora tries to label its regional dishes as authentic and therefore, national. Collingham rightly argues that, “The focus on authenticity fails to acknowledge that the mixture of different culinary styles is the prime characteristic of Indian cookery and that this fusion has produced a plethora of versions of Indian food from Mughlai to Anglo-Indian, from Goan to British Indian” (241). In the adopted land, this disputed and fluid idea of culinary authenticity gets equated to cultural authenticity, as the diaspora, in their narratives begins to employ food as “an intractable measure of cultural authenticity” (Mannur 3). This is done obviously to deal with the consciousness of their racial and ethnic identities, which otherwise comes under the ever-present threat of fragmentation. But the fact remains that once the journey is initiated, the diaspora’s religious or traditional mores, regional food habits, all acquire new sets of meaning, irrespective of all self-control. Thus, culinary authenticity however coveted, remains an impossible dream, as the re-creation of traditional dishes in a foreign setting, using local ingredients, is bound to create hybridity. Instead, we see the process of culinary “interorientation” and cultural “interchange” as they learn to tweak, subvert, and incorporate new food items into their palate (Bakhtin 317). This idea would be further explained in the analysis of the novel *River of Smoke*.

Nevertheless, the diaspora is often seen to be exercising what Mannur calls “culinary citizenship” – a position “which grants subjects the ability to claim and inhabit certain identitarian positions via their relationship to food” (29). We find the diasporic imagination, from cookery to literature, directly or indirectly employing “culinary discourse as an always available script for negotiating the pangs of migratory displacement” (29). Culinary citizenship is further conditioned by the machinations of nostalgia, which plays a large part in memory reconstruction. However, nostalgic desires are, as Mannur cautions, “always already predetermined, indeed overdetermined, in scripting immigrant attachment to the past” (28), which therefore can only result in distorted discourses. Thus, all attempts to fabricate native foodways in a foreign setting, are invariably tinged with the hues of fragmentation and contortion, which along with the disputed notion of authenticity results in a severe level of hybridisation among the Indian diaspora.

During the process of assimilation, food becomes one of the strongest and fastest triggers to reclaim the individual as it “evokes, often in a disjointed way, a whole structure of feeling” (K. Ray 2). Smells and tastes of long forgotten food, garner a strong hold upon the individual’s consciousness, as his taste buds combined with his vision and olfactory sense, immediately transport him to his past. Also, the past could be associated either with fond memories or traumatic incidents, further complicating it. Sudden resurfacing of the past, followed by the numerous journeys down the memory lane by feeding on familiar food, ultimately points to the fact that the culture of the adopted land can never replace the native culture from its position of primacy, especially for the first-generation immigrants. The situation is further complicated by the present ease of connectivity to the homeland, which ensures that the diaspora is constantly influenced by the expectations as well as the dictates of their family. As a result, the past remains as a persistent presence and continues to exercise a strong hold upon the diasporic mindsets and their levels of assimilation. Hybridity then becomes the natural outcome in such contact zones, wherein liminality becomes a permanent state of suspension, as the diaspora hangs in between the imagined past and the intrusive present.

The Indian diaspora’s engagement with food labour continued to the contemporary times, even among many voluntary migrants. According to Mannur, these individuals serve as “cultural brokers” whose experiences in food preparation have shaped their lives (137). They leverage their inherited traditional skills, knowledge, and identities to make a living in foreign countries. However, it is important to recognise that they often face significant exploitation in this process. Studies show that food sectors and catering industries thrive on the easy availability of cheap migrant labour (Kalra; Abbots). This has further contributed to the continuation of racism in the political and literary sphere. Wenying Xu has broadly spoken of Asian Americans’ teeming engagement in food service and production. She remarks that, “There is nothing natural or culturally predetermined about Asian Americans’ vital relationship with food. Harsh circumstances made such work one of the few options available to them. To survive in this country and to be able to send money to loved ones left behind and barred from immigration, they did what others wouldn’t, and did it with pride and dignity (Xu 12). Her comment is largely applicable to Indian migrants as well. Given the consumptive culture of the West, the food market creates one of the major openings for both skilled and unskilled labourers. Engaged in such businesses Indian immigrants have, like the Chinese, seemingly created a niche for Indian-

coded comestibles” (Mannur 31). However, more often than not, such achievements are marred with the disputed narrative of racism as well of exoticism.

Attraction towards the orient and its dishes, feeds the West’s abnormal yet trendy desire to consume and thereby experience the exotic ‘other’. Thus, curry has achieved an ironical cult status in the West, which is revered as well as othered. Curry, which is known all over the world for its derivation from India, is but another product of colonial fabrication, approximation, and capitalism – “the mongrelized offspring of England’s union with India” (qtd. in U. Narayan 164). The incorporation of curry is reflective not of its multiculturalism, but of the paradoxical fact that there was an obsessive desire on the part of the colonisers to know and taste India, while maintaining a safe distance. Susan Zlotnick argues that the act of nationalising and naturalising curry was carried out in order to deactivate the fear of hybridity which remained a “dangerous” after-effect of consuming the Other. Thus, curry was approximated on the self’s terms (U. Narayan 165), which twisted and anglicised the very facade of multiculturalism. With time its popularity also gave birth to curry powder- a premixed blend of spices that imparts a fixed and uniform flavour to all dishes, but which was strong enough to quell the vivid flavours of the Indian curries. Uma Narayan states that this manner of approximating curry was also reflective of the way India itself was approximated and ingested into the Empire. Similar is the invention of curry powder, which although a very distorted and insipid version, is presented as superior to the original Indian curries– an act which is at once loaded of the reeks of colonialism and capitalism! Other approximations include curry paste, chutney and mulligatawny paste. They were heavily commercialised and also entered cookbooks as well as popular literary imagination. Britain’s nostalgia for Indian dishes resulted in the serving of curry and a few Indian dishes as early as 1733 in the Norris Street Coffee House on Haymarket. Thus, dishes like kedgeree, balti dishes and pish pash appeared on the British scene as inspired from India. By 1920s several Indian restaurants peppered up around London and the numbers kept growing with the increasing migrant population. Many restaurants including Veeraswamy’s- a legendary culinary landmark- by Edward Palmer, cashed in on British nostalgia and orientalist desire by styling their restaurants in Indo-British atmosphere, along with their offerings of popular Indian dishes like vindaloos, Madras curries, dopiazas, coloured pulaos. The ironical craze for authenticity went to such heights that many restaurants like the Gaylord, acquired tandoor ovens to

produce tandoori chicken masala and naans. Eventually it led to the invention of the much-disputed dish- chicken tikka masala.

While historically curry has fed the West's hunger and nostalgia for power by providing as intimate as a taste of the other's food, its culinary xenophobia refuses to weaken even with time. As such, often, the Indian diaspora is accused of emanating their horrible curry stink- an allegation which is as derogatory as racial prejudice. Nonetheless, the Indian diaspora has successfully broadened their numerous regional cuisines and given it a global flavour, as can be witnessed in the mushrooming of not only private but also several public Indian eateries in the West. However, the dishes they serve are mostly fast cooked and loaded with ready-made masalas and food colour, as the West only recognise a distorted version of the actual dish, given their love for uniformity and approximation!

Apart from Britain, an endless number of creolised dishes have also appeared on other such cultural contact zones, across the world, where Indian foods figure prominently. Indian food, as Colleen Taylor Sen rightly remarks, "in its many incarnations has become a world cuisine" (Sen 311). Largely propagated by the migration of the indentured and other labourers, tradesmen, sailors (lascars) and servants, the massive demand of Indian food and its popularity have also been furthered and sustained by the presence of Indian students, researchers and other skilled personnel in these zones. Thus, roti has been called Trinidad's national dish. Trinidad and Guyana share similar dishes although names vary. Indian snacks like kachourie, baras (chickpea pie), phulories, saheena (spinach pie) and samosas are quite popular in Guyana and Suriname. Jamaica's best-known dishes are patties and curried goat which also bear Indian influence. Fiji is most popular for its curries which are amalgamations of Indian, Melanesian, Polynesian, Chinese and Western cuisines. As such Fijian curries include items like breadfruit, yam, cassava, taro root and leaves, and a number of seafood, which are cooked in coconut milk and flavoured with garlic, chilli, ginger, soy sauce and spices like turmeric, coriander, fenugreek, cumin. Similarly Mauritian cuisine is a conglomeration of African, Dutch, French and Indian ingredients, and techniques. The Indian deep-fried bread Dalpuri is quite popular in Mauritius which is filled with not only lentils as in India, but also with sauces, chutneys and pickles. South African cuisine was influenced by the Cape Malays. Some popular Indian food items in South Africa include biryani, dal, sambals, kebabs, tandoori chicken, puris, rotis, samoosas. Curries are known as kerries and served with rice with atjars

(Indian-style vegetable pickles), fruit condiments, chutneys, sambals as accompaniments. Most famous Indo-South African dish is bunny chow which was a direct outcome of its apartheid history. In East Africa khichri, rotli (millet bread) and dal are popular items, among other Afro-Indian dishes. Besides, many Portuguese speaking countries in Africa too reflect its Goan influence in the use of coconut milk in their seafood dishes. Southeast Asian countries like Malaysia and Singapore reflect the popularity of South Indian dishes like idlis, dosas, vadas, uttapams, sambars, rasams, served on banana leaves. What is unofficially considered to be Burma's national dish is a Chinese-Indian-Burmese hybrid called Mohinga, a rice noodle and fish soup, which is also a popular street food. The presence of Indian diaspora in Gulf and Mid-Eastern countries has resulted in the establishment of both inexpensive and posh restaurants, where dishes like biryani and tandoori chicken are easily available. Indian influence in North America can be witnessed in the mushrooming of numerous grocery shops and restaurants in almost every suburb and town and even various Indian commercial districts. Some remarkable names include Jackson Heights in Queens, New York; 'Curry Hill' on Lexington Avenue in Manhattan; Devon Avenue in Chicago and so on. Almost every imaginable Indian dish is easily available in the market along with ready-to-make and ready-to-serve products and even frozen or pre-packed vegetarian and non-vegetarian dishes. According to Purnima Mankekar, Indian grocery stores outside India "form a crucial node in the transnational circulation of texts, images, and commodities between India and the diaspora" (Mankekar 75). This is because such shops create "social spaces in which people of Indian origin might forge identity and community" (Mankekar 88) that might be intimate and empowering or suffocating (Abbots 117).

Indian cuisine has become a global phenomenon, although the dishes that appear outside India carry a long history of transformation, subject to gustative approximation, availability of ingredients, ease of cooking and public popularity. Western enchantment towards oriental products is furthered by non-Indians and Indians alike. As such contemporary times have given rise to the concept of food pornography, a stimulating gastronomic presentation, which is being hotly exploited by food businesses as well as many diasporic writers, artists, playwrights and film makers. Mannur presents a concise explanation of food pornography, "as an exploitative form of self-Orientalism in which Asian American subjects highlight the "exotic" nature of their foodways by exaggerating the terms of their otherness" (82). Being a basic sine qua non, foodways remain an easy

marker of one's cultural and traditional values, and, their differences from the mainstream culture of the adopted land. To exoticise these differences thus becomes an ethical way of commodifying one's culture and thereby capitalising on it. This is done not only through edibles but also by devising products even for "hyperreal eating"— an artful method of "stimulating eating without physically ingesting food" (82). Examples are those of the oriental food-based beauty products and also food-based works of literature, through which one can feed their "visual, olfactory, and psychic" (82) senses, and thereby indulge in a type of alternate consumption of the exotic.

Critiquing the Representation of Food and the Indian Diaspora in Select Novels

As the diaspora's state of eternal estrangement cannot be erased even with the act of returning home, the diaspora engages in the act of writing home, which again becomes a complex task given the multiplicity of discourse that enters this area. Diaspora narratives inherently possess intricate complexities as they are entwined within the discourses on identity, nationality, history, location, and other related factors. These overlapping categories are heavily influenced by the nuances of memory, the common and "primary baggage", that all diaspora carry with them. Memories, which regulate and sustain their lives abroad, are as Jasbir Jain explains "non-synchronous in time" (J. Jain 9), which often result in the formation of contradictory and complex images in the diaspora narratives. Diaspora narratives defy the frameworks of master narratives, and may also refuse to include factual information, in their attempt to question or re-define and narrate or de-narrate their personal, political and cultural histories (J. Jain 171). In the process, diasporic narratives reveal contradictory possibilities and alternate versions of truth and reality.

The novels selected for this chapter have been applauded for their refreshing take on the well deliberated topic of the East-West intermixture. They present a dialogic amalgamation of the homeland and the host-land, through the overworked yet essential structure of memory and nostalgia, which, as already stated earlier, has its own limitations. The sense of perpetual estrangement and in-betweenness, and the idea of reverse nostalgia, are most fascinatingly revealed in the narratives, through the continuous enactments around food. Through the medium of fiction the novels quite convincingly present what Krishnendu Ray calls, "the encounter between cultures buried in the depth of hearth and home", as they portray "the complicit and resistant practices of cooking and eating" (K.

Ray 1). While they have been extensively praised for their involvements with other issues of concern, their underlying rhetoric of food requires further exposure.

It is just as well because in the realm of literature, novels directly dealing with food are mostly deemed as “commodity comestibles” (Mannur 21), simply created to cater to the Western taste buds of multiculturalism. Such an idea then quite simply ignores other critical areas that the novels might be dealing with. This narrow labelling becomes even more constricting when such themes are explored by the writers of third world origin. Such works are simply seen as advancing the cut and dried method of oriental exoticism, and are quite severely criticised and dismissed from scholarly purview. But again, the fact remains that many aspiring third world writers are pressured by the need to exoticise, so as to receive attention and therefore acceptance. Thus, the very act of exoticising remains debateable. Therefore, it is not surprising that mainstream writers weave the yarn of food in a subtle manner through the fabrics of their much-acclaimed narratives.

The last two instalments of *Ibis* trilogy namely *River of Smoke* and *Flood of Fire*, share the rapid expansion of capitalism that drives the British against China, resulting in the First Opium War from 1839 to 1842. The capital hungry British merchants are the driving force behind the war, and among many other things, the novels trace how their insatiable appetite generates other appetites in its wake. *River of Smoke* traces Deeti and her clan’s settlement at the Colver farm in Mauritius. After her migration Deeti and eight of her shipmates are engaged as coolies at a far corner of the island, with very low population. They are the first settlers under the colonial government and along with their tiring plantation works, the female migrants like Deeti, are also burdened with the responsibility of preserving their culture by recreating “aspects of home and culture in a foreign setting” that reveal their leadership qualities (Pande 63). Thus, we observe the agency of Deeti, as a matriarch, who is quite instrumental in her clan’s progress through both the novels. Rather than relegating women to the periphery of his historical narrative, Ghosh brings them forth to the centre. Thus, the immersive opium wars on which the narrative centers, has been interestingly juxtaposed with the rebuilding of life by Indian women in the strange land.

While the insatiable appetite for silver, tea, and silk, consume the colonists, and opium addiction consumes the population of China, Deeti and her clan employ the exercise of consumption to their advantage. Their appetitive inclinations lead them to recreate

dishes from their past with new ingredients as available in the locality. We witness the birth of creolised dishes and the invention of new traditions, each of which sustains the other. For instance, the whole La Fami Colver clan embark on an annual expedition to Deeti's shrine, that is hidden up above a mountain, in a far corner of Mauritius. The clan members assemble in midsummer, during the Gran Vakans to visit her shrine and conduct a puja followed by a feast. The after-puja meal is the most exciting and memorable part of the expedition, which is followed by a visit to Deeti's "Memory-Temple" to recollect the experiences of Deeti and her shipmates' journey from India to their settlement in the island. The preparation for the feast begins from the previous night with eager participation by everyone: "the tin-roofed bungalow would ring to the sound of choppers and chakkis, mortars and rolling-pins, as masalas were ground, chutneys tempered, and heaps of vegetables transformed into stuffings for parathas and daal-puris" (4). The next morning the women would start preparing the after-puja meal as they would roll out "tissue-thin daal-puris and parathas and stuffing them with the delectable fillings that had been prepared the night before: finely ground mixes of the island's most toothsome vegetables - purple arwi and green mouroungue, cambaré-beti and wilted songe (6).

Thus, Ghosh presents a detailed description of the way the migrants and their descendents create hybrid customs out of their diasporic status and local circumstances. The annual expedition is carried out as a way to revisit their beginnings in the island and pass it onto the younger generation as a part of their collective memory. The painstaking way in which the plain meals are prepared serves to disseminate the message of their triumph upon the adversities of the new land. It is also reflective of the fact that the old diaspora was less concerned with the politics of "culinary citizenship" and culinary authenticity, and more involved with the process of culinary interorientation where they learnt to adopt new food items into their evolving cuisine. The following excerpt further present how local fruits, vegetables and spices are adapted into their previously staple dishes, thus giving birth to a creole cuisine:

Those meals were always vegetarian and perforce very plain, for they had to be cooked on open fires, with the rudest of utensils: the staples were parathas and daal-puris, and they were eaten with bajjis of pipengay and chou-chou, ourougails of tomato and peanut, chutneys of tamarind and combava fruit, and perhaps an achar or two of lime or bilimbi, and maybe even a hot mazavaroo of chilis and lime

- and, of course, dahi and ghee, made from the milk of the Colvers' cows. They were the simplest of feasts, but afterwards when all the food was gone, everyone would lean helplessly against the stony walls and complain about how they'd banbose too much and how their innards were growling and how bad it was to eat so much, manze zisk'araze ... (8)

This is an instance of the Indian diaspora growing at the expense of their hostland, the Mauritius, through the very act of eating and even overeating (Bakhtin 281). This is because, as Bakhtin suggests in *Rabelais and his World*, eating enables one to transcend their physical boundaries so that they might consume and devour the world (Bakhtin 281). In the present context, eating is also indicative of the diaspora's engagement in a continuous and open-ended dialogue of being and "becoming" (317). Besides, the process of culinary interorientation in a way also represent the subversion of the dominant culture of the host land. As Bakhtin writes, "Human labor's encounter with the world and the struggle against it ended in food, in the swallowing of that which had been wrested from the world. As the last victorious stage of work, the image of food often symbolized the entire labor process" (281). While Bakhtin speaks of this connection with regards to the oldest social systems of the world, this is applicable to the lives of the old Indian diaspora as well. Food also plays an important part in the preservation of their memories as, "Years later, when that escarpment crumbled under the onslaught of a cyclone, and the shrine was swept into the sea by an avalanche, this was the part that the children who had been on those pilgrimages would remember best: the parathas and daal-puris, the ourougails and mazavaroos, the dahi and ghee" (8).

Another point of conglomeration of cultures can be observed in the suburbs of Canton, also known as "Fanqui-town" (Ghosh 52). Because, it is a place full of luxuries, and free of "the multiple wrappings of home, family, community, obligation and decorum", the place turns into a third space for the opium merchants, where all their cultural and personal boundaries become fluid and they attain a state of liminality (Ghosh 52). Indian Opium merchants like Bahram Modi, experience the formation of new identities, and enlargements of their personalities, as their lucrative trade transforms them into confident and highly successful businessmen. Their stay in Canton is made easier due to the presence of the boat-population who provide them necessary provisions and services. The general description of Canton, being a busy centre of commerce, evokes the

images of carnival in the reader's mind. As Robin Chinnery writes in one of his letters to Paulette, Canton, is "like a ship at sea, with hundreds - no, thousands - of men living crammed together in a little sliver of a space. I do believe there is no place like it on earth, so small and yet so varied, where people from the far corners of the earth must live, elbow to elbow, for six months of the year" (Ghosh 185). Most interestingly, "a *great number* of its denizens are from India" as the opium merchants are followed by their entourage of servants and sailing crew such as "khidmatgars, daftardars, khansamas, chuprassies, peons, durwans, khazanadars, khalasis and lascars" (185).

While *Sea of Poppies* focuses on the luxuriant daily meals of the imperial opium merchants in India, *River of Smoke*, focuses on the lavish spread enjoyed by Bahram in Canton, as a part of his daily affair. Most of his meals had a ceremonial charm to them and judging by the intricacies of his dining patterns, it can be assumed that much time has been devoted to its development. For instance, the daily breakfast was an "elaborate affair", personally looked over by his cook, Mesto:

Shortly before the Seth entered the daftar, Mesto would cover the table with a silk cloth; then, once Bahram was seated, he would lay before him an array of little plates and bowls, containing perhaps some akoori - eggs, scrambled with coriander leaves, green chillies and spring onions; some shu-mai dumplings, stuffed with minced chicken and mushrooms; maybe a couple of slices of toast and some skewers of satay as well, and possibly a small helping of Madras-style congee, flavoured with ghee, and a small dish of kheemo kaleji – mutton minced with liver. And so on. (Ghosh 190)

As expected, the meals are hybrid in nature as Indian dishes fuse with Cantonese cuisine. Neel observes that "No. 1 Fungtai Hong was a world in itself, with its own foods and words, rituals and routines: it was as if the inmates were the first inhabitants of a new country, a yet unmade Achha-sthan" (Ghosh 192). There is an "indiscriminate lumping-together" of all the Indian migrants as although they hail from different parts of the Indian subcontinent, they live and eat together as a family. Their bonds are further strengthened in Canton due to the locals' contempt towards them, who believe that India is the only source of the "black mud" that swamped China (Ghosh 193). Thus, the ties between this section of Indian diaspora are "knotted not by an excess of self-regard, but rather by a sense of shared shame" (Ghosh 193).

Similar to Deeti, Asha-didi is the linchpin in Canton as she provides stability and support to the Indian migrants, by serving Indian food in her kitchen boat. Her eatery is the only establishment throughout the shores of the Pearl River that provide familiar dishes “that an Achha could enjoy with untroubled relish, knowing that it would contain neither beef nor pork, nor any odds and ends of creatures that barked, or mewed, or slithered, or chattered in the treetops” (Ghosh 324). Her presence is gratifying as she liberates the fear of food pollution among many Indian migrants, who would otherwise live on boiled greens and rice (Ghosh 324). As she provides a sense of food security and culinary familiarity her eatery is regarded as “an institution” among the Indian migrants in Canton (Ghosh 324).

There are a number of banquets that fill the pages of *River of Smoke*. They act as sites of information exchange among the opium merchants, and carry the plot to the next turning point. The continuous flow of food and drink signify their immense success in China, and although there are significant tidings about a complete ban to be imposed on the opium trade, the merchants remain optimistic about their future success. The Committee dinner among the merchants presents an opportunity to observe the adoption of multicultural food by both the European and Indian merchants. For example, local cooks from Macau are generally hired to produce the daily meals for the English, but on certain occasions they are ordered to serve Macahnese food. Thus, the opium merchants feed on Macahnese dishes like watercress soup, Alvarinho wine from Moncao, croquettes of bacalhao, boulettes of pork, spiced salad of avocado and prawns, stuffed crabs and fish tarts, Macahnese grilled chicken and sawdust pudding (Ghosh 235-239). Further, the readers witness as many as eighty-eight courses of meals served at the banquet hosted by Punhyqua, a wealthy Chinese merchant of the Co-Hong guild, and a well-known gourmet. Exoticism is at its best as the fare consists of dishes like, “ears of stone” loved by monks, “Japanese leather”, roasted caterpillars, fish lips, sea-cucumbers, rolls of shark’s fin, candied birds’ nests, morsels of porcupine, to name a few (Ghosh 287-294). They induce a sense of pleasant torpor among the guests but also emphasise the power struggle among the characters. Such feasts are private in nature and resemble ceremonies of greed and ambition, and affirmation of capitalist values. As opposed to the banquets of popular festivals that represent the collective triumph of people, such banquets, convey the gluttony of self-centered people. As Bakhtin remarks, “Such imagery is torn away from the process of labor and struggle; it is removed from the marketplace and is confined to the house and the private chamber (abundance in the home); it is no longer the “banquet

for all the world," in which all take part, but an intimate feast with hungry beggars at the door" (Bakhtin 302). Thus, banquets in Ghosh's *Ibis* trilogy represent the construction of a dilapidated world lacking social justice, where the plentiful land of China is literally devoured by the hungry opium merchants, under the false doctrine of Free Trade and democracy. The all-consuming hunger for capital is well reflected in the fact that the few opium merchants readily sacrifice millions of lives in both India and China, for their personal motives. Although the opium merchants are forced to surrender their cargoes by the end of the novel, they do so only after they are assured that their losses would be reimbursed with interest, after the upcoming war.

Greed and desire reach its ultimate point in *Flood of Fire*, the final instalment of *Ibis* trilogy, which revolves around the commencement of the First Opium War from 1839. Opium is once again instrumental in devising the journey of yet another group of characters from India to China. While Bahram's wife Shireen Modi travels to recover her husband's wealth, Deeti's brother Havildar Kesri Singh heads an army of Indian volunteers to fight in the First Opium War. On the other hand, we see the growth of Zachary Reid from an impoverished young sailor to a greedy businessman, as he follows the footsteps of Mr and Mrs Burnham to learn the trade of opium and the tricks of capitalism. Briefly speaking, the novel portrays the age of want, as greed and desire reach unprecedented heights. It traces the "ever increasing appetites" of British as they attempt to capture both India and China through their strong military force (Ghosh 137). As observed by Robin Chinnery in *River of Smoke*, the opium merchants are "convinced that the doctrine of Free Trade has given them licence to do exactly as they please" (*River* 373). Lisa Lowe remarks that, despite the Qing governments strict laws and protocols prohibiting the drug, "By the 1820s and 1830s, opium was the largest single traded commodity that Britain imported to China. Silver received from drug runners at Lintin was paid into the Company's factory at Canton, and by 1825, the illegal trade rapidly raised most of the funds needed to buy Chinese tea" (Lowe 103).

While most of the characters are ruled by their personal desires and wants, the metaphor of craving is most appropriately symbolised by Zachary Reid as he vocalises his endless desires to Baboo Nob Kissin: "I want to be rich, Baboo; I want to have silk sheets and soft pillows and fine food ... I want to own ships and not work on them. That's what I want, Baboo; I want to live in Mr Burnham's world." (258). Baboo Nob Kissin plays an

important role in turning Zachary from a poor sailor and carpenter, to a businessman. He fulfills Zachary's wants by entering him into the business of opium, a world that gives birth to innumerable wants: "'Opium is the solution', he said to Zachary. 'That is how people can be made to want; opium can stroke all desires. That is what you must do; you must learn to buy and sell opium, like Mr Burnham. You are most apt for the part.'" (258). In Baboo's persuasion lies his desire to hasten the end of Kaliyuga, by ushering Kalki to put an end to the age of greed and desires. As Zachary enters into a partnership with Mr Burnham, it unleashes his "ever increasing appetites" (Ghosh 137). With each passing day, the hunger unleashed by opium grows stronger, on both sides. The merchants derive immense profits by selling their cargoes, and the rising prices in the marketplace reflects the rising hunger of opium, especially among the young Chinese nationals.

In the face of the upcoming opium war, merchants like Mr Burnham and Zachary devise to amass further profit by capitalising upon the dietary tastes and prejudices of the Indian military volunteers. Mr Burnham's capitalist plan launches a direct attack on the palate of the Indian volunteers, when they are at their most vulnerable state, far away from their home, anticipating the dangers of the upcoming war. Identifying the profitable situation, Mr Burnham reveals to Zachary how they can apply the "first law of commerce" that is, "'To buy cheap and sell dear'", by inflating the prices of the food provisions of the Indian sepoys:

'Assembled in these waters are thousands of soldiers and sailors from many parts of the British Empire. Every one of them must be fed, several times a day, according to their tastes and prejudices. Of all those men the hardest to feed are sepoys, especially Bengal sepoys, because they adhere to a great variety of dietary rules. They will eat nothing but their familiar provisions: grains, lentils, dried vegetables, spices and the like. Fortunately, these foods are cheap and easily available in their own country- but overseas they are often difficult to find. This sometimes results in a situation that is very well suited to the operation of the first law of commerce.' (Ghosh 414)

Mr Burnham orders Zachary to persuade the honest Captain Mee to buy provisions from them at higher prices, for which he will be suitably compensated. Although Captain Mee loathes the cancerous habits of the businessmen, he agrees to their demands as Zachary

threatens to reveal his adulterous affair with Mrs Burnham. Zachary's success further fuels his greed and ambition and he decides to request Mr Burnham for a partnership in his firm.

The trope of consumption acquires a rather negative demonstration in Ghosh's narratives as its life generating principle is replaced by the gluttonous desires of greedy capitalists, resulting in the degeneration of previously self-sufficient nations. Baboo Nob Kissin's words precisely sum up the ravaging image of consumption presented in the narrative, as he attempts to explain the meaning of the war and destruction to Kesri. Pointing at the warship *Nemesis*, sailing past the destructed forts, Baboo Nob Kissin says:

Dekho- look: inside that vessel burns the fire that will awaken the demons of greed that are hidden in all human beings. That is why the English have come to China and to Hindustan: these two lands are so populous that if their greed is aroused they can consume the whole world. Today that great devouring has begun. It will end only when all of humanity, joined together in a great frenzy of greed, has eaten up the earth, the air, the sky. (Ghosh 510)

While opium is undoubtedly the central driving force of the novel, studying the alternative trope of food reveals the narratives of diasporic food consumption, dietary prejudices, culinary nationalism and culinary interorientation. Reading the rhetoric of food in Ghosh's novels foregrounds intimate interpretations of migrant subjectivities and agencies in the grand narrative trajectory of the opium trade.

Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* presents the rampant commodification of cultures and lives in America as compared to the strict cultural and alimentary regulation in India. The title itself is created out of two polar ideas, the amalgamation of which presents an endless inexhaustible possibility of newer interpretations. While selecting this novel the endless number of research that has been conducted upon its self-evident rhetoric of food, are taken into consideration. Nevertheless, the novel remains a most realistic rendition of the diaspora's equation with the culture of the adopted land, as driven through the convenient vehicle of food. Lodged between the polar states of fasting and feasting food is used as an authoritative figure in regard to which the characters engage in and perceive each other's cultures. By this technique Desai adds a raw substance to the otherwise commonplace occurrences of their lives. Through the limited pages of the novel's second

part, Desai presents an oceanic account of Arun's firsthand experience with an American family, namely the Pattons, which greatly alters his approach to the adopted land.

Born and brought up under the strict guidance of MamaPapa, Arun is revered at his home as a long-awaited prized possession as he is showered with all the possible patriarchal importance. Each and every phase of his existence has been entirely charted out by Papa which forces his whole identity and emotional capacity to sink "in a deep well of greyness" (A. Desai 125). The only place where he exercises his individuality is in his food choices, which nevertheless frustrates Papa, and in turn, the entire household. Feeding Arun remains a dreaded exercise during his childhood as he is prescribed boiled eggs or cod liver oil, which he nevertheless spits out after enormous struggle by the women of the house. We see in Papa the colonial hangover of the meat-eating stereotype, which he deems as "one of the revolutionary changes" along with cricket and the English language. Meat-eating specifically remains a "novel concept of progress" (32) from the purported "effeminacy" of the Indian male- an idea which Papa vehemently champions. It reinstates his consciousness of masculinity depending on which Papa practices his contempt against his "cereal- and vegetable-eating" (33) relatives. Under this colonial aura of meat-eating masculinity, it takes years to identify and to finally accept Arun's vegetarianism, which profoundly bothers Papa as it "amounts to a devaluation of masculine identity" (Poon 44). Papa worries that without the regular and almost medically important dose of masculinity, Arun would be reduced "to the ways of his forefathers" who were incapable of tasting success and progress due to their "meek and puny" effeminate selves (33). Papa's strict adherence to his adopted ideals is challenged and subverted by Arun's determined vegetarianism which elucidates his refusal to adhere to the dietary regulations of his household. The tool of food amplifies how Arun's passive silence in other matters converts into an assertive voice as his food choices "constitutes one visceral disposition and natural habit that no amount of applied force or pressure can alter" (Poon 44).

Nevertheless, the constant performative pressure lands him very early into a state of inbetweenness, that already becomes his "actual existence" (A. Desai 125) even before his journey to America. Arun's journey is that of a forced migrant, prearranged by Papa, where his sense of estrangement intensifies and acquires a whole new dimension as he arrives on the land of opportunities and plenty. His strictly constructed perception of the world is rendered limited and in turn bombarded by the rampant ideals of consumerism

and commodification. Shocked to his core, Arun like Jemubhai, seeks to retreat into his own shell and absolutely rejects all forms of companionship, including that of his co-migrants. Arun's nostalgia is remarkable as he possesses "no past, no family and no country" (176), and therefore it is not for his lost home or his parents, but only for Indian food which has been a commonplace and almost a bothersome matter, invariably presented irrespective of his desire or revulsion. Eating which has virtually been a mechanical duty finally assumes the status of personal necessity as Arun realises the influence of food upon one's sanity. As if his single journey was not enough, we see Arun undertaking a second journey which lands him directly into the core of an American family. Added to his primary nostalgia is the nostalgic desire for freedom and a personal space as Arun finds himself again among the "sugar-sticky web" (199) of domestic atmosphere, along with its endless conflicts. It is interesting to note that while Arun struggles to remain alone and excluded from every group at the University, it is the business of hoarding or even rejection of food, that unexpectedly brings him closer to at least two American women.

His second journey allows us a firsthand perception of the immigrant's gaze, as America acquires the status of 'Other', to be viewed with surprise, suspicion and revulsion. A reversal of the stereotypical "immigrant excess" is presented through the diasporic perception of Arun as he enters the surprising hyperreality of the supermarket which exhibits "a perverse and dehumanized space of rampant consumerism" (Pazo 278). Such public places are termed by the anthropologist Marc Augé as 'non-places'- an artefact of super modernity- which cannot be considered as anthropological places due to their lack of any relational or historical identity (Augé 78) but can be easily identified due to their essential quality of excess (Augé 29). Mrs Patton along with her co-shoppers jubilantly bear the legends such as "Born to Shop" (187) or "Shop Till You Drop" (188) while they customarily engage in a wordless "abstract, unmediated commerce" (Augé 78) in a "hyperreal" (Baudrillard 4) world of collective consumerist culture, that is "surrendered to solitary individuality, to the fleeting, the temporary and ephemeral" (Augé 78). The supermarket, Arun learns, is deficient of any kind of relation to the organic modes of living or even a connection to local products. The abundant availability of every kind of food in the shelves, irrespective of seasons or cultures, arouses his suspicion as they seem "as unreal in their bright perfection as plastic representations" (188). To Mrs Patton however such excess of year-round availability is a commonplace affair, as the daily patterns of her life is mapped by what Gupta calls, a sense of "cultureless ubiquity" (Gupta 37). Thus, the

vegetables put on sale are perfect embodiments of material production, which exhibit “all the features, the whole discourse of traditional production, but it is no longer anything but its scaled-down refraction” (Baudrillard 17). They are hyperreal merchandise produced to lure materially hungry shoppers like Mrs Patton with their brightness, “all shining and wet and sprinkled perpetually with a soft mist spread upon them, bringing out colours and presenting shapes impossible in the outside world” (Desai 187). Nevertheless, to the conventional eyes of Arun, their gleaming cleanliness ensures that they are devoid of “taste, savour or nourishment” which otherwise has been a regular deal among the “plain, unbeautiful, misshapen, fraught and compromised” (Desai 189) products that he was habituated to, in India. Moreover, Desai juxtaposes Arun’s disgust to the open freezers of meat which lie “steaming in pink packages of rawness” (187) to Mrs Patton’s attraction towards the “harmlessly dry and odour-free ... racks of nuts and spices” (Desai 187). This way, the immigrant’s perception of America is presented while also commenting upon the western distortion and approximation of the orient, as it is further revealed that whatever surprises the ingredients might be carrying, “were bottled and boxed with kindergarten attractiveness” (Desai 187), to further enhance its exotic lure and consumer base.

One can find Arun asserting his “culinary citizenship” or his gastronomic boundaries, as he regards the steak on Mrs Patton’s plate where “grease and blood run across it and spread” (Desai 169) and politely refuses to his share of the charred meat. In another occasion Mrs Patton almost vocalises Arun’s thoughts on meat eating: “oh, that red raw stuff, the smell of it! I’ve always, always disliked it” (Desai 183). Additionally, Mrs Patton extends a cooking invitation to Arun whereby he is expected to act as a cultural broker. Although he does not know cooking, he accepts the challenge as refusal may mean to Mrs Patton that, “he never ate at home but starved” (Desai 197), which points towards the vast communication gap in America, further enhanced by the cultural differences. His failure in cooking is dramatised by the sudden onslaught of smells, foreign to both Mrs Patton and Arun, while the khaki-coloured, lumpy texture of the lentils sucks all appetite out of him. This gastronomically hybrid dish seemingly unsettles Mrs Patton’s very idea of an exotic vegetarianism, as she verifies its doubtful authenticity asking, “Is it the way your mother made it?” (Desai 197). Her opinion is vehemently vocalised by her daughter Melanie, who considers it goeey and yucky. Consequently, we never see Mrs Patton sharing meals with Arun, although she keeps herself busy in planning and hoarding more than necessary ingredients for her “vegetarian summer” (Desai 184). It can also be

suggested that Mrs Patton engages in a kind of “hyperreal eating” (Mannur 82) whereby she plans and buys, but is never seen to be enjoying her vegetarian and oriental purchases. Although a comparatively eager companion, she fails to understand the personal or cultural beliefs behind Arun’s vegetarianism, and is rather satisfied with her detached “culinary tourism” (qtd. In Pazo 271), whereby she could comfortably isolate, “certain aspects of his culture in order to adorn her own monotonous life” (Pazo 271). Thus, even though she is well aware of the health problems that Americans suffer from for their insalubrious diet, she simultaneously considers Arun’s foodways with a peculiar eye for the “exotic”. This way she conveniently maintains a safe distance from Arun’s meals, thereby illustrating her plasticity, the ideals of her momentary desires and her faithful adherence to the material culture.

Here, another dimension can be added to Mannur’s concept of “hyperreal eating” (Mannur 82) through Melaine’s alimentary disorders, whereby she physically eats but then pukes every morsel out, immediately upon the fulfilment of her bingeing desire. Melanie’s is not an artful consumption but rather a distressing reaction to Mrs Patton’s filial irresponsibility, as a result of which she is driven to find contentment in the world of material commodities. What persists is a substituted and therefore hyperreal experience of eating, as driven by the excess of the American culture, which ironically results in an unquenchable hunger and a perpetual fasting. By the end of the novel, as Arun perceives the resemblance of Melanie’s bulimia to Uma’s fits, he gains a new understanding of the minute similarities of the two cultures, which early seemed vastly different and thereby enters the phase of liminality.

Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss* seems to follow the footsteps of *Fasting, Feasting* as it presents a collusion of the East and the West and lays bare stark differences between tradition and modernity, self and the other, local and the global, privileged and underprivileged, plenty and scarcity and so on. Along with the general diasporic nostalgia, it also presents the facet of reverse nostalgia, which can only be experienced by the privileged diaspora. Additionally, this novel presents quite a fresh perspective on gender discrimination as it focuses on the working conditions of male food labourers in the United States.

The narrative frame alternates between different time frames and locales, and two opposing cultures to produce this beautiful yet sad tale of omnipresent polarity and irony;

of abhorrence and desire. Desai's masterful narrative technique creatively juggles the mundane lives of the natives and the diaspora, and those few individuals caught in the snare of in-betweenness. This is not only a tale of inheritance or of loss, but also that of perpetual loneliness and the absurd attempts that the characters make to tide over their problems. Often their extreme desperation is lightened with the interpolation of occasional comic elements which possess the ability to make the reader laugh despite a haunting sense of the approaching doom. A traditional approach at reading the novel is bound to make one feel that the losses portrayed are reparable, and not of grand magnitude. But if we for once look at the tale not for its face value, but through the lens of food, we find lodged under the familiar terrain of East West encounter, the frustrating attempts involved in the maintenance of fragmented identities and the resultant hybridity, this time in the vicinity of the home and nation. As opposed to the discourse of culinary hybridisation, Desai presents an alternate narrative of domestic reconstruction of foreign dishes, as a method to feed the reversed nostalgia, so as to lessen the shocks of return. Self-estrangement and perpetual plurality then appear as an underlying motif which spreads its tentacles on all the major and recurring characters of the novel. The inheritance of colonial baggage and the tremendous shame and anxiety of the immigrant, sometimes leading to, what Bhabha has very aptly termed "colonial mimicry", becomes even more striking as we find the characters engaging in remarkable alimentary struggles within their daily and otherwise humdrum life. Also, Desai goes beyond its mere aesthetic and symbolic presentation as she connects food to the context of labour to reveal the insidious corruption that occurs even between co-ethnic immigrants.

Although never directly stated, the clever employment of food imageries and dining scenes seem to present Jemubhai as an alternate and distorted version of Gandhi himself. The way he has been portrayed, starting from his voyage to England, to the very end of the novel, stand in polar opposition to Gandhi. Although both of them journeyed for the similar reason, Gandhi's journey was marked by success as he accepted his self and thereby found his voice to leave a mark in the world. On the other hand, Jemubhai's constant struggle to negate his own self and imitate the West results in his steady disintegration. While Gandhi's journey was mediated by the dictates of filial vows, filial love chokes Jemubhai's very soul. In a furious gesture, he throws away the homemade food that his mother has lovingly packed for his journey, as it stands to remind him of his own inferiority due to his lack of experience with English food and cutlery served in the

ship. With his symbolic disposal of the Indian foods in the sea, and his contempt towards his mother's "Indian love, stinking, unaesthetic love" (38), he sheds off his Indian identity, and journeys towards a perpetual negation of his own self. Then onwards begins a life-long insistence on an English way of living, most remarkably expressed through his choice of English foods. While Gandhi learnt to master vegetarianism (along with his vegetarian friends) and in return found his voice in the global philosophical and political sphere; the tongue-tied Jemubhai rejects all social activities and instead retreats into his shell. The danger of self-negation is presented through his self-estrangement as "he grew stranger to himself than he was to those around him, found his own skin odd-colored, his own accent peculiar" (40). Food and alimentation enact a strong role in his case as his identity is pinned onto his inheritance of curry stink and brown skin, while his olfactory sense is constantly haunted by the lingering smell of shit, which reminds him of his "daily trial of digestion" (110), a personal difficulty which further magnifies his inadequacy. Back home Gandhi struggled to unite the nation through the ideals of self-sufficiency, whereas Jemubhai seems to experience reverse nostalgia and therefore engages in the act of colonial mimicry, whereby, his self-negation turns to self-obsession. The adoption of English mannerisms, most interestingly visible through his borrowed gastronomic boundaries, seem to be the ultimate solution to retain this sense of superiority, whereas Gandhi propagated the idea of a national language. Unable to bear the Indianess of his family members and acquaintances, he begins to live alone in his self-constructed shell at Cho Oyu, as opposed to Gandhi who exercised the maxim of simple living and high thinking, and lived in communal harmony at his ashram. Even Gandhi's goat has been replaced with Mutt, a fancy dog, bearing the symbol of modernity and consumerism.

As opposed to the safe distance maintained by the West, Jemubhai in his appetitive inclinations, attempts to closely mirror the West, but, "with the passion of hatred" (119). The novel presents an alternative to the multicultural obsession, as it depicts the nativisation of English cuisine in India. Of course, approximation remains an unfinished business, as the re-creation of occidental cuisine with oriental ingredients, by oriental bodies, results in inferior and doubly-hybrid dishes. The absurdity of such attempts presents how western ideals are constantly challenged by Indianess, through the tool of food. Thus we see Jemubhai exercising his adopted culinary citizenship as he demands an English styled tea, every evening, with a perfect balance of sweetness and saltiness. However, the cook with all his clumsiness in this game of Englishness, ensures that the tea

essentials are contaminated, with the very essence of Indianess— blackness and dirt. Thus the white sugar is dirtied with mica like glinting granules, while the biscuits look like cardboard and dark finger marks spoil the white of the saucers— thereby replacing Jemubhai’s very concept of teatime with a distorted adaptation (3). Failure in culinary authenticity results in such dishes which are never truly Indian, nor completely western and neither fusional. It may be said that they become the counterparts of curry, and contribute to the mongrelised progeny of England and India’s union. Similarly, Jemubhai’s colonial mimicry as a way to assert power, ultimately turns him into a powerless and self-contradictory entity, “despised by absolutely everyone, English and Indians, both” (119). He lives his life in the constant fear of his artificial constructs failing at every confrontation with Indianess. Thus he becomes the subject who attempts to be a “reformed, recognizable Other” but is invariably lost in the slippage, the excess, and the difference (Bhabha 86), which counteracts his mimicry.

Colonial hangover is also present among other characters like Sai, Lola, Noni, Mrs Sen, Father Booty and Uncle Potty, who subscribe to the trendy discourse of multiculturalism as revealed through their food choices and get-together conversations. We see Lola and Mrs Sen engaging in constant debates about England and America, each protective of the countries where they have visited and gain diasporic experiences, and which now make them nostalgic for their adopted lands. As a view to multiculturalism, Lola and Noni have trained their maid Kesang, “to make an Indonesian sate with peanut butter and soy sauce, a sweet-sour with ketchup and vinegar, and a Hungarian goulash with tomatoes and curd” (67). On their visit to Glenary’s, where they pick Chinese for the lunch, Lola reminds everyone about her husband’s visit to China where he has found that, actual Chinese food is quite different from those served in India, “A much worse matter, in fact” (213-14). It mirrors Bhabha’s concept of the fluidity of culture and cultural identity, as the nativisation of foreign dishes is carried out, to make them suitable of the Indian palate. Othering is also presented as they believe that actual Chinese food is inferior to the approximated Indian version. An inverted representation of racial encounter is presented through the narrative of immigrant odour as Father Booty’s homemade cheese is suspected, by the local police at the check post, for excessively smelling like some bomb-making materials.

Nevertheless, it is again through the medium of food that all their colonial constructs are rendered obsolete. Towards the end of the novel, with the increased intensity of the Gorkha movement, the Judge and his neighbours are forced seek refuge in the local and the national. Faced with food scarcity- a problem common to any political unrest- they adopt for the first time, “the real food of the hillside” (Desai 281), such as dalda saag, bhutiya dhaniya, mushrooms, which grow on their garden, and locally sourced churbi cheese and bamboo shoots. Their adopted western tastes which long reassured their very sense of superiority, have now converted to the source of danger and mockery, thereby revealing its absolute absurdity. It is then the meagre local items, which surprisingly provide an “air of wealth and comfort” (Desai 282), amidst the broiling revolt. Their very survival becomes impossible unless they conform to those very things that they have previously ignored as inferior to their tastes.

In the case of Biju and his father, the cook, we find masculine bodies struggling to make a mark in what has long been considered the domain of femininity- the kitchen. Forced by poverty and joblessness, Biju is an illegal immigrant associated in the sector of food labour. Unable to find job satisfaction Biju’s stay in New York is marked by frequent changes of workplace. As he moves from one restaurant to another, Desai reveals “a whole world in the basement kitchens” (22), where different cuisines from various nations fiercely compete to co-exist with each other in the multicultural craze. For instance, at Baby Bistro, one can observe that: “Above the restaurant was French, but below in the kitchen it was Mexican and Indian. And, when a Paki was hired, it was Mexican, Indian, Pakistani” (21). Such multicultural restaurants are breeding sites of frequent battles among the workers, of course regarding national animosities, which further harden the stereotypes against them. Over one such fight with a Pakistani, Biju gets kicked out of Baby Bistro, as it threatens to upset the balance of the “perfectly first-world on top, perfectly third-world twenty-two steps below” (23). It is not only his lack of experience or “hostility” that make his American employers expel him, but also his stink, which apparently signifies his lack of self-respect. Racism is evident as the owner of Pinocchio’s Italian Restaurant buys toiletries and most importantly soaps and deodorants to “politely” tone down Biju’s stink of “immigrant excess” (Mannur 212). Working at numerous restaurant kitchens, Biju learns how Indians are perceived around the world, as Fiji, Singapore, Japan, South Africa and so on, would much prefer to expel the Indians from their countries. It reaffirms the

fact that Indian bodies are unacceptable even at places, where Indian foods have visibly influenced the general cuisine and contributes towards a substantial portion of income.

Desai also highlights the otherwise invisible corruption that exists within the domain of professional food labour as the focus moves from home kitchen to restaurant kitchens. The novel is a commentary upon the stark working conditions of male labourers in restaurant kitchens- an area which was generally disregarded in favour of studies on immigrant female workers' exploitation. Nevertheless, the conditions remain same for all the third world labourers as proper employment terms and conditions hardly exist in such low-wage job sector. Their service as cooks, dishwashers, delivery persons, waiters, are often invisible and remains devalued, which demonstrate the colonial continuities of racism and gendering. While the working environment remains constricting, they are often overworked and underpaid. Their wages are even lower if they are provided food and accommodation. The dimension of workplace exploitation has also broadened. For instance, exploitation is further normalised through the discourse of family as co-ethnic employers often suppress employee dissatisfaction through such strategies. Thus Harish-Harry and Malini, Biju's employers at the Gandhi Café, employ the idea of free accommodation and the notion of kinship to further exploit their workers:

By offering a reprieve from NYC rents, they could cut the pay to a quarter of the minimum wage, reclaim the tips for the establishment, keep an eye on the workers, and drive them to work fifteen-, sixteen-, seventeen-hour donkey days. Saran, Jeev, Rishi, Mr Lalkaka, and now Biju. All illegal. "We are a happy family here," she said (146).

Miabi Chatterjee terms these ideas as a "managerial ideology", which seeks to "privatize economic relations and screen them from public view and regulation" (qtd. in Mannur, 129). Employee dissent is cleverly waded through treats and gifts and a few words of friendliness. Nevertheless, it is also made clear that these were simply "a decoy, an old Indian trick of master to servant, the benevolent patriarch garnering the loyalty of staff; offering slave wages, but now and then a box of sweets, a lavish gift" (189). The earlier communal senses have thus diminished under the rampant capitalism, as co-immigrants 'other' and cheat each other for personal profit. Even the cook remains underpaid although he has served Jemubhai for the major part of his life. The only explanation seems to be that he is provided accommodation and food, and therefore his wages are closely

monitored. With Jemubhai's obsession towards colonial approximation, such managerial ideas may not be foreign to him.

Desai further reveals the practical dilemma between morality and profession, as Indian immigrants face the daily debate between the "holy cow", meant for reverence, and the "unholy cow" for consumption. In their temporal and competitive lives, it remains a fact that only those who could follow the ideals of professionalism and objectivity would exist. An extreme capitalist, Harish-Harry suggests how most of the middle-class immigrants might balance the situation by following the demand supply theory, which has been the Indian- American point of agreement. According to him Indians make good immigrants because they can satisfy the crazy demands of American markets (145). Harish-Harry belongs to the "haalf 'n'haf" (148) immigrant crowd, who seek to balance so many things, that they themselves cannot identify their authentic selves, from their confusing pluralities. They aim at assimilation while at same time attempt to exercise exoticness.

Further, Desai presents how food becomes the common medium to convey dissent even among fellow immigrants. Immigrant perception is also presented through the subversive criticism of foreigners' foodways as Achootan, the fellow dishwasher remarks on steaks, "we may be poor in India, but there only a dog would eat meat cooked like this" (136). In another interesting episode, we find the desi customers emphasise their exoticness, by ordering hot vindaloos as opposed to the options of medium and mild. To counter such pretence the desi waiters spice up the dishes with the hottest of flavours, which also bear their unadulterated anger. It derives the expected results as all pretension comes undone, "Faces smarting, ears and eyes burning, tongues becoming numb, they whimpered for yogurt, explaining to the table, "That is what we do in India, we always eat yogurt for the balance. . . ."' (148). It reveals that the very act of balance, which promises to keep all problems at bay, is itself highly unstable. Such instances also depict the ways through which immigrants try to confront pretension and power abuse amongst them.

The novel does not offer grand tragedy, but through its snapshots of the commonplace, proffers the delicate discourse of racism, immigrant dilemma, nostalgia, class critique and power politics. The intricate passages that I have underlined in my analysis bear the capacity to inflict deep and pernicious wounds upon the soul. Through the twin narratives of categorisation and approximation, the perpetual perplexity of

abhorrence and desire is effectively staged. While the underprivileged immigrants suffer among other things, at the hands of their co-immigrants, the privileged individuals back home seek to relieve their diasporic pasts through the absurd attempts at the reconstruction of western tastes so as to feed their constructed sense of superiority. In this way both Jemubhai and Biju enact the liminality in which they are eternally bound.

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* is remarkable for its critique of the native's attempts to impress and thereby consume the 'Other', through the mechanics of voluntary culinary re-creation and gastronomic hybridisation, as opposed to culinary conservation. This analysis focuses on the narrative of Sophie Mol, a naturally hybrid offspring of Chacko, the Indian and Margaret Kochamma, an English woman. She is "the centralizing colonial metaphor" (Elwork 180), whose arrival followed by her untimely death, etches irreversible boundaries among the members of the Ipe household, in Ayemenem, Kerala. Although completely set in India as opposed to conventional diasporic novels, the reason for including this text in the chapter is to comment on the dangers of "cultural amnesia" resulting in "colonial neurosis". Through the tragic visit of Sophie Mol, Roy presents a realistically unnerving picture of how immigrants are perceived in India. The wilful marriage of the native with its conquerors, such as that of Chacko's to Margaret, represents the Orient's desire to be accepted into the mainstream perception of the powerful. While this "marriage" seemingly acts as a bridge to tide over the colonial baggage of inferiority complex, it nevertheless points to "the adulation of the British by the Indian people to the point of even self-hatred" (Whitt 36). Among the mixed responses of resistance and awe, Roy chooses to focus on the narrative of reverence, as the temporarily visiting diaspora is placed on an idolised pedestal well before their arrival, and remains there long after Sophie's death. Under this plinth the existence of the co-natives- the subaltern- are crushed and derogated.

Revolving mostly around the perception of the twin characters of Rahel and Estha, the novel travels between the entwined narration of the past and the present, to lay out a tragic and singular tale of the steady disintegration of their previously inseparable identities. The close attention paid to the development of Rahel and Estha, beginning from their childhood imagination to their twisted adult perception, as necessitated by the unfolding circumstances, lend an incessant poignancy to the narrative. Roy's skilful poetic language engages with her hybrid narrative technique, whereas the plethora of pictorial

imageries lends an unusual thematic richness to the novel. The picturesque description of Kerala's landscape, that was associated with the joys of childhood is juxtaposed to the travails of untouchability that becomes an oppressing reality of Rahel and Estha's adulthood. Roy's useful commentary of communism and Marxism, combined with her stance against colonial neurosis and even the antiquated caste systems of India, ensure that her narrative never loses its allure for the reader.

Most of the Ipes are culturally amalgamated members of an anglophile family, whereby their beloved daughter Sophie Mol acts as a "unifying metaphor" (Elwork 179), between the otherwise unbridgeable gap of the two cultures. Being a temporary but "potentially realized dream" (Elwork 179), Sophie Mol is the fragile embodiment of the cultural intercourse. The novel presents a faithful, eager and obsessive subscription to the constructed idea of the "colonizer's myth" (Elwork 183), as necessitated by the hybrid household of the Ipe family. Being Syrian Christians yet maintaining caste boundaries, their fragmented identities have grown new wings at the prospect of Sophie Mol's arrival. The family engages in frantic preparation of "The Play" (136) designed to welcome her as they rehearse the English songs, prime the twin's English language, pick formal outfits to wear at the airport and practically dream of everything that may delight Sophie Mol. The night before Sophie Mol's arrival Chacko brushes up his adopted etiquettes, as he engages in a heavy dinner, clearly reflecting the gluttonous habits of the colonisers. The food that he feasts on are also symbolic such as: "Roast chicken, chips, sweet corn and chicken soup, two parathas and vanilla ice cream with chocolate sauce" (Roy 114), items which reflect a hybrid combination of the foreign and the native, just like his marriage to Margaret Kochamma. He seemingly ends his dinner by fusing "the last of the chocolate sauce from the sauceboat with a piece of paratha", which the narrator describes as his "disgusting, after-sweet sweet" (Roy 116). As if the symbolism is not evident enough, the writer goes on to reveal Chacko's ambition to "die of overeating" (Roy 114), a habit most clearly associated with the colonial dining extravaganza.

Elwork maintains that Sophie Mol functions more as a metaphor than a character (187) and, through the study of food, the artistic juxtaposition of this metaphor to that of food can be easily recognised. The family prepares a strictly controlled homecoming ceremony where Mammachi plays the violin and Kochu Maria bakes a tall double-deckered chocolate cake bearing the message "Welcome Home Our Sophie Mol". The

imagery of the cake, a symbolic foreign desert, represents the “culinary citizenship” enacted on behalf of the visitors’, by the native body. This gesture is more like a ploy, painstakingly fabricated to gain recognition and acceptance, which would in return enable ingestion or a hyperreal consumption of the visitors. However, the reader can also sense Mammachi presenting a mixed response to the visitors, as she wonders if Sophie Mol would like some iced grape crush, a tender thought which is simultaneously counteracted by her hatred towards Margaret Kochamma, for being Chacko’s ex-wife. This singular instance, among many others, tends to upset their careful set-up as it reveals the fragile foundation upon which all the drama is balanced.

At the same time, to further show their reverence, characters like Baby Kochamma, Mammachi and Kochu Maria, continuously belittle Estha and Rahel, as Sophie Mol is always judged against them to be the superior one. However, such acts serve to belittle their own selves as they appear to accept, internalise and proudly exhibit their mythical inferiority. Also, being smothered by native affection, such flimsily construction bonds always border on the verge of breakage and disintegration. Quite remarkably the steadily growing intimacy between the cousins results in Sophie Mol’s death. In her departure, Sophie Mol deflates all the hyperreal aspirations of the native. As Elwork remarks her death is, “the dream spitting them back out again” (179), proving it to them that no matter how wholeheartedly they engage in colonial mimicry, their attempts are doomed to remain an unfinished business, as they are primarily constructed on the site where the self is negated and the reality is rejected.

The God of Small Things through the metaphor of hyperreal consumption among other things, represents how the native attempts to rekindle its long-lost romance of the colonial past. While they otherwise attend to the preservation of family honour by bottling its secrets, paying strict attention to caste regulations, and the dictates of the Love Laws, they are ready to give up such ideals when faced with the prospect of colonial unity and ingestion. Their self-contradictory principles bear the answer to why Ammu is disowned for loving Velutha while Chacko is proudly championed for marrying Margaret and fathering Sophie Mol. This obsessive love and romantic admiration for the English culture, overshadow the present and drastically overturn the future existence of the native, as they engage in hating their own culture and othering themselves.

Conclusion

The fragmented entity of the Indian diaspora is reflected in their understanding of food as a portal through which they seek to re-establish their ethnic histories, cultural identities and sense of community in a displaced world. Along with an ever-present site of identity negotiation, foodways remain one of the most common and important tools for the double-edged task of assimilation and categorisation. While this remains the major area of concern in any culinary studies on diaspora, this chapter analysed the experiences of the underprivileged among the diaspora. It explores the multiple layers of consumption such as literal consumption, alternate consumption and hyperreal consumption. It also examines the concepts of “culinary citizenship”, culinary “interorientation” and the unfinished business of culinary “authenticity”. The chapter derives that the old diaspora was generally involved in the process of culinary “interorientation” as they adopted local food items into their cuisine, thus subverting the new world by devouring it. We see an evolution in the cuisine of the Indian diaspora, as previously typical dishes attain new complexity by the inclusion of local ingredients and the admixture of new methods of cooking, resulting in the formation of creole and hybrid dishes.

The chapter also briefly engages with the idea of food pornography and the narrative of “hyperreal eating”, in the writings of the Indian diaspora. It should be noted that, although the selected novels engage with food among the Indian diaspora, they use it to reveal the immigrant perception and the intricacies of life at an adopted land. Thus, they distort the idea of food pornography and unsettle the notion that diaspora writers depicting food in their books are simply “commodity comestibles”.

In the adopted land where women are generally entrusted the responsibility of cultural preservation, the chapter revisits the engagement of underprivileged men in the food business. Therefore, the study focuses not only on the domestic kitchen of the diaspora but enters the domain of professional kitchens, whereby immigrant food labourers enact the role of “cultural brokers” (Mannur 137). The study also focuses on the immigrant’s gaze as they perceive their adopted lands with surprise and appreciation, as well as suspicion and revulsion.

This chapter also studies the narratives of return migration and reverse nostalgia, whereby the diaspora no longer remains diasporic, yet preserve their adopted ways. As

such, the chapter examined the dangers of colonial mimicry through the native's approximation of foreign dishes, which results in reverse hybridisation and even generated self-hatred. Nevertheless, the diaspora's prolonged proximity with the foreign culture ensures a degree of cultural transgression and exchange, as a result of which gastronomic boundaries or "culinary citizenship" is bound to be replaced by culinary "interorientation" (Bakhtin 317). As a result the diaspora achieves a truly hybrid state as "ethnic absolutism" (V.Mishra 17) goes through a liminal or transitional stage and finally seems to enter the threshold of transnationality.