

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the representation of food in select Indian English fiction published between 1936 to 2015. Seventeen canonical texts are examined through the following themes— the construction of hunger and the scarcity of food, the self-control of the palate, the gendered division imposed on food, and the use of food as tools of assimilation and categorisation. Each thematic chapter seeks to comprehend the rhetoric of food and the politics of narration and representation in the select novels, influenced by the challenges posed by the colonial rule, which continue to impact the country. For instance, the thesis looks at how the colonial stereotype of meat eating was propagated among Indians and the way Gandhi countered it by advocating for vegetarianism as a means of challenging the colonial power. Amidst these political conflicts surrounding Indian diets and the push for Sanskritization of food, the eating habits of marginalised communities like the Dalits and the tribals were pushed further into the periphery as their eating habits were ignored and even ridiculed. The thesis looks at the creation of food insecurity and famines brought about by the colonial changes in the agricultural system of the country. In the context of the Dalits, it examines how unconventional food items emerged due to food scarcity, eventually becoming integral to their communal identity. Similarly, in the context of the diaspora, it examines the creation of creole dishes as well as hybrid dishes in the adopted land. Regarding the domestic sphere, the thesis examines how food serves both as a source of oppression and a means of subversion.

Overall, the thesis demonstrates the significant role food plays in developing and enhancing the arguments of the selected texts. The validity of this thesis stems from the fact that although food has been a significant part of political discussions and creative expressions, critical studies in literature have often overlooked it as a mundane subject unworthy of critical consideration. In this respect, the thesis challenges the conventional notion of food as devoid of political significance and demonstrates its capacity to convey a diverse array of social and political meanings. Keeping in mind the interdisciplinary nature of food studies, this work draws relevant theories from diverse theoretical schools ranging from economic theories to diaspora theories. By adopting this approach, the thesis unveils the intricate elements of food rhetoric in fiction, enabling the exploration of alternative and contextually nuanced interpretations of the selected fictional texts.

Keywords: Food, Food Rhetoric, Food Studies, Literary Food Studies, Indian English Fiction