

## INTRODUCTION

One could begin introducing the importance of studying food by quoting Roland Barthes's statement that, "an entire 'world' (social environment) is present in and signified by food" (26). Food is the fundamental element that shapes and governs our existence, inherently present in our daily routines, but often overlooked without much consideration. Food and its consumption are constantly malleable phenomena. Food plays a pivotal role in how we perceive ourselves, and even acts as a key indicator. It does so through a duality of desire and repulsion, where our preferences and aversions towards certain foods reflect our personal identity. Additionally, food contributes to our sense of belonging, as it can be tied to cultural, social, or familial connections. Simultaneously, it helps to demarcate and differentiate us from others, emphasising our unique tastes and dietary choices. In this way, food acts as a multifaceted index that shapes our understanding of self.

The question of food would not be a superficial thought to ponder upon, if we consider the extent to which different cultures and societies of the world have contributed to construct its meaning, consciously or unconsciously, throughout history. Our food choices have a significant impact on shaping our identity, as they contribute to the formation of our personality. The types of food we prefer and consume reflect intimate details about us, including our historical, cultural, social, and psychological information. In essence, food plays a crucial role in defining who we are and holds the potential to reveal a wealth of personal insights. It should however be noted that while food has been intrinsically related to our identities, there has been numerous issues of racism accorded most visibly to ethnic eaters, by the majorities of the host-land. Literary food critics, like Anita Mannur, Wenying Xu, and William R. Dalessio, challenge the idea that eating defines our identities, by demonstrating how our food preferences can vary depending on various circumstances like availability, practicality, and so on. Thus, recent literary scholarship on food has rendered Claude Fischler's article "Food, Self and Identity" (1988) controversial as critics uncovered the reductionist current of the clichéd idea "we become what we eat", and the patriarchal notion of cooking as a method to tame and appropriate the wild universe (Fischler 279, 284). Instead of the "ethnocentric and racist simplifications" of limiting one's identity to the foods consumed, literary food critics like Xu, Paula Torreiro Pazo, Mannur have drawn our attention to the communal implications of eating by their figurative application of Fischler's theory of incorporation (Pazo 123).

As for the need to conduct literary food studies, Mary Douglas has ever so rightly justified the study of food as, “an enormously important subject treated quite wrongly as an aspect of our material life, whereas it is the prime model for communication, assessment, classification and regulation and all the more informative because it is not verbal” (qtd. in Passariello 53). This seeming mundaneness and triviality of food acting as a barrier towards its serious theoretical study is constantly talked about by other writers such as Roland Barthes, Mannur, Xu and in the Indian context, Krishnendu Ray and Uma Narayan. Nevertheless, there have been numerous scholars who lent their attention to food and brought different theoretical perspectives into play. Because it is not verbal, the hoard of information that it presents, needs to be carefully gleaned before making conclusive statements.

### **Background of the Study**

Imageries related to food have been a remarkable part of fiction since time immemorial. But recent studies on food and literature have brought to light the technicalities and advantages of using food, which earlier remained mostly neglected. Now food is not only limited to its social function but is also valued for its material function. Use of culinary symbols, contexts and images, facilitate writers to present vivid and at times subtle descriptions of food, in order to appropriately express their ideas and drive the action of their plots, and to make their works relatable and more memorable. The ideas that literary works express through food can be considered as “food narratives”, as the actions and events revolve around acts of preparation, consumption or even imagination (Littlejohn 1). As messages are communicated to the reader, through the general treatment of the text or the activities of the characters, it commences the creation of meaning, which further morphs into what Barthes calls cultural myth(s). “Food narratives are myth”, says Littlejohn, “they are created, perpetuated and made meaningful through the practice of language use and story” (34).

Although food and eating have remained intensely relevant in all cultures, it is as late as the mid-twentieth century, 1970s to be specific, that food studies as a genre, began to capture the potential attention of critics and theorists. Food studies is a part of material culture, but as Douglas and recent exponents of food studies have proved through their works, material culture is every bit more than simply material (Passariello 62). Food studies remain largely indebted to the groundbreaking works of anthropologists,

structuralists, sociologists, historians and classicists, for its inception as a valid area of critical enquiry (Avakian & Haber 3-4). Due to the numerous influences from various fields, food studies has been necessarily endowed with a multidisciplinary approach, which in turn also lends a certain self-reflexivity to it. Similarly, food studies in literature aims to transcend the traditional perspectives of reading as it brings in versatile ideas from interdisciplinary fields to provide a rich, meaningful interpretation of literary narratives and the contexts they present or are written in.

The eclectic repertoire of food studies boasts of stellar scholars and theorists from a wide array of disciplines, such as Claude Lévi-Strauss, Mary Douglas, Jack Goody, Sidney Mintz, Roland Barthes, Harvey Levenstein, Alice P. Julier, Stephen Mennell, Margaret Visser, M. F. K. Fisher, Madhur Jaffrey, and Elizabeth David, Laura Shapiro among many others. In the Introduction to the third edition of *Food and Culture*, Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik justly remark that food studies “resists separating biological from cultural, individual from society, and local from global culture, but rather struggles with their entanglements”, which in the long run has made interdisciplinary research a possible and viable option (Counihan, Esterik 1). Thus, the field of food studies has become an increasingly growing discipline as scholars from as diverse backgrounds as geography, film studies, architecture, literature are becoming interested in the study of food.

Food as representing the texture of human life was always there. But, a conscious use of food as a literary tool began recently and simultaneously with the growing awareness and institutionalisation of food studies. The intermingling of art, sociology, education, psychology, anthropology, history, dietary literature, and cookery books, created a revolutionary discursive space which was traditionally beyond the remit of the literary scholar. This has pushed the understanding of food from simply a substance of nutrition to a wide ranged system of communication, having a semantic wealth of rich symbolic meanings. It bestowed upon literature, what Mannur calls, “a logical script through which to navigate the alimentary symbols and motifs” (11).

Moreover, the development of post-theory has added wings to the positively growing interest in food studies. Post-theory is an interesting evolution in the field of theory as it draws theory’s fetishising focus away from hard core ideological abstraction and lends it to the study of various potential “small theories”. What is most beneficial for

the scholars of food studies, is post-theory's advocacy of the interdisciplinary approach to the study of literature, along with the linguistic one. Combining the merits of both modern and postmodern literary theory, post-theory heralds the possibility of alternative theories so as to contribute towards new modes of knowledge production (Xian 13-14). Stefan Herbrechter and Ivan Callus *Post-theory, Culture, Criticism* remark that, post-theory opens up the possibility to conduct a study of theory's 'others' - such things which were repressed, excluded or even unthought-of in the past (8). The focus has now moved on from the political to the study of the material and cultural aspects of life, as post-theory fuses both the linguistic approach of modern literary theory as well as the interdisciplinary approach of postmodern theory (Xian 14). As such, study of food, cinema, sports, lifestyle, travel and so on – falls within the ambit of post-theory. Besides, although the conventional focus was chiefly on the ideals of high cultures and abstract forms, the force of the smaller details of life, the low cultures, and even the grotesque forms, could not be ignored for long as they undoubtedly are an indispensable part of our civilisation.

In literature, where the aim is to impart certain stimulative messages through its tales, food acts as a creative and meaningful platform “upon which and through which human dramas act out” (Xu 164), as portrayal of food realistically brings out the ontological condition of the characters (Xu 13). Similarly, Boyce and Fitzpatrick argue, “food in literature is often part of a bigger story” (3) which is revealed through dialogues, metaphors, imageries, and tropes related to food. When food starts the transformation from nature to culture, as shown most remarkably by Lévi-Strauss, it gets endowed with the ability to influence human culture in all its entirety and complexity. This is because once raw materials commence the process of becoming edible, ideological constructs by default seeps into it. This way, our cuisine is turned into an ideological hegemony, which further determines and dictates our tastes and preferences enormously. Thus, food has been known for the construction, deconstruction and re-construction of identities, as it is able to demarcate boundaries through the recurrent activities of assimilation or categorisation. As opposed to ideological hegemony, food is also used as a tool of subversion and in patriarchal scenarios it has been remarkably used as an effective agency to gain control over the household. This way food also encourages a continuous dialogue in itself as it can simultaneously act as an ideological apparatus and also as a means to subvert ideology. The rise of multiculturalism has revealed how food can be used as an instrument of fusion, which further gives rise to exoticism. In multicultural countries food has always been used

as a device to further racism, fear and anxiety against ethnic minorities belonging from diverse background. Thus, food can work as a powerful political force even while it may seem nonpolitical and highly personal. For example, in India, control of food has been remarkably employed by Gandhi and many of his followers to achieve freedom for the nation. Food also influences socioeconomics and gender as it is intrinsically set within “a complex web of affiliations mediated by class and sexuality” (Mannur 20).

The rise of women’s literature has significantly contributed to the growth of literary food studies. The use of food and culinary images and symbols serve as powerful tools for women writers to express their ideas and opinions about the everyday struggles they encounter. It also allows them to address societal discrimination related to their food choices and the restrictions imposed on their consumption. Also, notions of gender, language, sexuality, kitchen politics, social dislocation, assimilation, cultural preservation, are equally commented upon. For women, food can act as a means of entrapment or as a liberating agent as well as a source of indulgence and fulfillment. The location of the kitchen and competency in it is a key issue in women’s lives. Various power plays are also enacted inside and outside the kitchen regarding food and its preparation. The space of the kitchen is a transformative one as it can quite easily forge or break connections among the individuals dependent on the kitchen for food. Moreover, the space of the kitchen is also a typical conduit through which familial and national ideologies could be circulated, which seek to enter the consciousness of the eater as soon as food is eaten. It can be said that food is used as a powerful medium to present women’s self-definition within a patriarchal cultural framework and also to develop alternative ways and alternative languages through which to overturn the very bounds of patriarchy. This is why Heller and Moran have deemed kitchen as a “room of one’s own” (3), while Avakian sees cooking as, “a vehicle for artistic expression, a source for sensual pleasure, an opportunity for resistance and even power” (6). Here it should also be noted that cooking is not a strictly feminine activity, as male cooks too enter the culinary discourse. Food carries a gendered charge, and the very act of food preparation is endowed with self-indulgence, empowerment and autonomy—qualities traditionally defined as masculine (Dalessio 11). However male cooks are only occasionally seen in literature. Sherrie A. Inness in her book *Dinner Roles* espouses five elements of the male cooking mystique, whereby she observes that whenever men cook they have to make sure that their masculinity is not diminished. Cooking for men, she finds, should be a rare event and whenever they cook, they should be applauded. Besides

it is also expected that men should be associated with masculine cooking styles, such as “outdoor cookery”, where manly food like meat should be prepared (Inness 18-19). Such inherent dichotomy with the act of cooking lends it an ambiguous position, as it may simultaneously represent “subordination, self-sacrifice, and submissiveness” or “creativity, autonomy, and resistance to oppression” (Dalessio 11). Literary fictions are also witness to the fact that traditional gender roles can be undermined and the very power positions can be displaced or inverted, when women act as consumers and men as cooks.

The study of food rhetoric shows how food works as an ideologically persuading implement by expressing and reinforcing ideological beliefs and values, as it is tied to cultural, social, and political meanings and practices. Therefore, literary food studies, like Dalessio observes, should refrain from “exclusively focusing on a food item’s substance to the exclusion of its context” because food is prone to constant changes, according to the situations in which it is partaken, as explained most famously by Barthes (Dalessio 165, Barthes 29). Additionally, Xu warns scholars to be wary of their selection so that instead of applying alimentary analysis to texts where food is nothing but a “peripheral excess” (163), attention could be paid to those texts where food references and imageries positively work to develop the central argument of the texts. However, this study is undertaken with the belief that there can be an alternative approach to Xu’s recommended textual selection. For instance, one can also attempt to analyse the food references in canonical texts of a certain period to understand whether food had been acting as the central driving force, even when literary food studies were not in vogue, or were at best, in their nascent stage. This is the approach that guides the subsequent chapters of the thesis, and the selection of texts has also stemmed from this belief. The novels selected for the study bear witness to the fact that food is an essential driving force among the texts and not just a marginal or incidental embellishment.

### **Food Studies in India**

The exploration of food and food culture in India involves an ongoing examination of intriguing aspects, including the dynamics of communal dining rules, the diverse range of tastes and taboos, the classification of food as sacred or impure, the multitude of fasting practices with their respective rationales, historical famines, issues of food insecurity and scarcity, gendered divisions in food practices, the phenomenon of food hybridisation, and much more. The colonial era has undeniably positioned food at the heart of political

dynamics. Both during colonial rule and in its aftermath, food has served as a shared variable and a common script for navigating power, shaping the complex narratives of domination and resistance, through food. The desire for spices, for instance, played a pivotal role in establishing sea routes to India and its subsequent domination. Simultaneously, the exertion of control over food, encompassing one's physical and mental well-being, as propagated by Gandhi, ultimately paved the way for India's journey towards independence.

During the colonial period in India, two contrasting situations emerged. On one hand, culinary desires and imaginations were fuelled by cultural influences, colonial encounters, and a yearning for diverse cuisines. On the other hand, there was the prevalent problem of famines, hunger, malnutrition, and food insecurity. In fact, the frequent occurrences of famines and the widespread starvation they caused, served as unmistakable indicators of the colonial era. Among the villagers and the underprivileged, the situation was so grim that even caste boundaries and taboos were temporarily dissolved as people from different religions and castes received and shared cooked food in close proximity (T. Das 9). They were compelled to embrace non-conventional sustenance, including roots, unfamiliar plants, and wild berries, discarded vegetable and fruit peels scavenged from trash bins, along with animal carcasses, ants, and field rats (T. Das 8). Despite advancements and progress, issues of hunger, malnutrition, and food insecurity persist, underscoring the enduring consequences of colonial-era policies and the ongoing challenges that the country faces in addressing these issues.

Food in India also bears significant imprint of caste, taboos, and identity politics, particularly evident in debates over contentious food choices like beef, rat, and fermented/pungent foods. The Hindu diet, which prohibits such foods, is often regarded as superior in taste and hygiene compared to the diets of Dalits, Muslims, and tribals, who include them in their consumption practices. The consumption of fermented or pungent foods, like *akhuni* /axone (fermented soybeans), commonly used in Nagaland, is often associated with accusations of primitivism, savagery, and uncleanness in mainland India (Kikon 80). These assumptions create divisions between "our" and "their" food cultures, involving moral judgments about specific social groups and imposing hierarchical positions on food items. For instance, certain castes in India, like the Mahars in Maharashtra and the Musaharis in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, were assigned caste names

that identified them as consumers of dead cattle and rats, respectively (Tak and Aranha). A dominant feature of Indian modernity is the way “a particular version of Indian history and power networks plays a significant role in dictating the dietary practices of dominant groups as national cuisine, while other food habits are erased from the social memory and the dining tables of the nation” (Kikon 81). Veena Shatrugna, a retired medical scientist from the ICMR-National Institute of Nutrition, sheds light on how the recommended dietary allowance (RDA) in India, starting from the early 1960s, recommended and even enforced a vegetarian diet for the entire population. This approach ignored the food culture of the economically disadvantaged people who relied on various local meats to fulfil their nutritional requirements. Shatrugna says the push for a vegetarian diet was influenced by the upper-caste perspective that looks down upon meat-eating. The nutritionists and economists involved in determining the RDA predominantly belonged to the upper castes, which carried a Brahminical influence on defining what constitutes a balanced diet. According to Shatrugna, the primary focus of these nutritionists and economists was to find the most cost-effective solution, resulting in an emphasis on cheap cereals and pulses as sources of not only calories but also proteins and other nutrients. This notion of hierarchy between food cultures is also reflective of the process termed as “Sanskritization” by M.N. Srinivas (Srinivas 30). In simple terms, Sanskritization is the process by which lower castes imitate and adopt certain practices, such as vegetarianism, teetotalism, and the rituals and beliefs of higher castes, as a means to achieve upward mobility within the society (Srinivas 30). Despite the substantial influence of food on India's image and history, there is a noticeable scarcity of fictional representations of these issues.

In the context of Indian English fiction, there are a few noteworthy works that provide a fascinating ground for undertaking literary food studies, which however remain underutilised. For instance, writers like Bhabani Bhattacharya and Mahasweta Devi are well known for the treatment of artificial famine and man-made hunger in their fictional accounts. Writers like Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan, deal with the dietary politics of Gandhi, and the way the simple eating habits followed by Gandhi, become national symbols in the fight for independence. Novelists like Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, Kamala Markandaya, Arundhati Roy, Rohinton Mistry, and Dalit writers like Bama, deal with issues of caste and class divisions, and other injustices meted out to the underprivileged. In their works food is used as a dialogue against otherness and untouchability. Shashi Deshpande, Anita



Desai, Kiran Desai, Salman Rushdie, Jhumpa Lahiri, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Amulya Malladi, Manju Kapur, portray the Indian diaspora's attempts at both assimilation and categorisation through the consumption of familiar foods in other adopted lands. They also focus on women's utilisation of food as a means to subvert the discriminatory ideals of the patriarchal society.

Apart from these writers there are many authors who deliberately foreground the use of food in their works, to offer readers an engaging and immersive experience. A cursory exploration of representations of food in Indian Writing in English reveals works such as Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* (1999), Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003), Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices* (1997), Amulya Malladi's *The Mango Season* (2003) and so on. Additionally, there are collections of short stories centred around food such as *Karma and the Art of Butter Chicken* (2017) by Monica Bhide, *The Anger of Aubergines: Stories of Women and Food* (1997) by Bulbul Sharma among many others. Some noteworthy food-themed poems consist of A. K. Ramanujan's "Breaded Fish" (1997), Annie Zaidi's "Chicken Claws at Midnight" (2013), Arundhati Subramaniam's (2010). "You and marmalade" (2010), and Sharanya Manivannan's "Benediction for the Feast" (2013). While these works have garnered scholarly attention, there are also numerous non-fictional works that offer rich potential for critical research. Examples of such works include *The F Word* (2010) by Mita Kapur, *Eating India: Exploring a Nation's Cuisine* (2007) and *The Hour of the Goddess: Memories of Women, Food, and Ritual in Bengal* (2001) by Chitrita Banerji, *Love, Loss, and What We Ate* (2016) by Padma Lakshmi, *Climbing the Mango Trees: A Memoir of a Childhood In India* (2006) by Madhur Jaffrey, *Monsoon Diary: A Memoir with Recipes* (2003) by Shoba Narayan. These writers blend cultural history, nutrition science, personal memories, traditional recipes to vividly capture their experiences with food. Furthermore, an extensive body of research can be conducted on the genre of cookbooks that delve into the intricacies of Indian cuisine. Some notable contemporary Indian cookbooks include *The Everything Indian Cookbook* (2004) and *Modern Spice: Inspired Indian Flavors for the Contemporary Kitchen* (2014) by Monica Bhide, and *The Essential North-East Cookbook* (2003) by Hoihnu Hauzel.

### **A Note on the Corpus**

To ensure a precise focus on the research area, this thesis exclusively examines the sub-genre of Indian English fiction, deliberately excluding food memoirs or cookbooks from

the scope of analysis. By limiting the study to this specific genre, it allows for a concentrated exploration of how food is represented, employed, and interpreted within the realm of Indian English fiction, providing a more in-depth understanding of its literary significance. The fictional world of novels serves as a discursive space where multiple issues can be addressed. By decentralising the official or literary language and parodying it, the novel highlights the “low genres” and the minutiae of everyday life (Bakhtin 67). It represents the world and our lives in all their totality, encompassing a wide spectrum of diversity and uniqueness, thereby saving it from ideological abstraction. Being a sensitive receptor of the social milieu, the novel intrinsically stresses on the mundane details of life, whereby the trope of food becomes prominent. Therefore, studying food in this context is essential as it can provide a concrete critique to, “safeguard against the danger of sacrificing nuance and detail to totalising pictures of colonialism and contemporary political landscapes” (U. Narayan 161). As would be exemplified through the subsequent chapters, food imagery has been extremely useful as a literary tool in Indian English novels.

The thesis examines the following novels: Mulk Raj Anand’s *Coolie* (1936), Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura* (1938), R. K. Narayan’s *The Dark Room* (1938), *The Guide* (1958), and *The Vendor of Sweets* (1967), Bhabani Bhattacharya’s *So Many Hungers!* (1947), Kamala Markandaya’s *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954), Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1981), Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* (1997), Kiran Desai’s *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* (1998) and *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), Anita Desai’s *Fasting, Feasting* (1999), Easterine Kire’s *A Terrible Matriarchy* (2007), Bama Faustina’s *Sangati: Events* (2005), Amitav Ghosh’s *Sea of Poppies* (2008), *River of Smoke* (2011) and *Flood of Fire* (2015). The significance of food in these texts goes beyond mere inclusion; it plays a vital role in shaping the narrative essence. In many instances, pivotal actions and events within the plots revolve around food, underscoring its central importance to the storytelling.

Considering India's complex history of colonisation, economic challenges, man-made famines, sociopolitical and racial dynamics, and rich cultural diversity, it becomes evident that a singular theoretical approach would fall short in providing an accurate understanding of India's relationship with food. To thoroughly examine the rhetoric of food in the Indian context, it is imperative to draw upon multiple theories from diverse

theoretical frameworks. This thesis follows the postulates of post-theory, that challenges theories' preconceived notions of 'universality', and directs one's attention to the importance of studying 'small theories' and the specifics of localism, so as to conduct a responsible and comprehensive literary criticism (Xian 14).

## **Objectives**

- to re-read food references in select canonical texts of a certain period and ascertain how food constitutes the central argument of the text
- to analyse the figurative relation of cooking, consumption, and literary recreation which writers present through the mode of fiction
- to examine the idea of culinary imperialism and the self-fashioning of taste among Indians
- to critique the dietary politics of Gandhi
- to understand the dietary politics in the domestic realm
- to problematise the assumed gender and class disparities as visible in the kitchen, the menu of the dining table, and the portions on the plate
- to study the absence of food and the way new cuisines are born out of poverty
- to examine the way the Indian diaspora relates to food as it becomes a tool for the double-edged task of assimilation and categorisation

## **Hypotheses**

The thesis begins with the following hypotheses:

1. Food is a repository of complex metaphorical meanings that verbal language might be unable to adequately convey.
2. Food has been a central driving force, in certain canonical Indian English fiction, even when literary food studies were not in vogue, or were at best, in their nascent stage.
3. Exploring food might offer a nuanced perspective on the formation or resistance of gendered identities, as well as shed light on how food practices themselves can be gendered.

4. Literature can be universal, but food provides a space where the nuances of multiple cultures and locales can be studied and contextual realities can be uncovered.
5. Food is an archive of cultural, social, economic, and political meanings and practices, and examining food tropes can help one derive an alternate and even more contextual interpretation of fictional texts.

## **Methodology**

- The research is qualitative in nature and would use food as an analytical tool to facilitate a close reading of the select novels.
- The thesis would focus upon the analytical and interpretative application of relevant theories generated by diverse theoretical schools that include economic theories, anthropological theories, colonial discourse theories, postcolonial theories, gender theories, diaspora theories, and other interrelated theoretical concepts.

## **Review of Literature**

Further deliberation on this matter, calls for a brief literature review on the theoretical works conducted on food studies in literature. Critical works such Jennifer Ann Ho's *Consumption and Identity in Asian American Coming-of-Age Novels* (2005), Wenying Xu's *Eating Identities: Reading Food in Asian American Literature* (2007) and Anita Mannur's *Culinary Fictions: Food in South Asian Diasporic Culture* (2009) all cogently draw on Sau-ling Cynthia Wong's book *Reading Asian American Literature: From Necessity to Extravagance* (1993), where Wong studies the food-driven thematic binary of necessity and extravagance, among the first and the second generation Asian American immigrants (Wong 13).

Ho presents the study of the adolescent immigrants' foodways and its complex relation to the formation of identity, among a selection of Asian American coming-of-age novels. She organises her analysis through four distinct type of identification such as historic pride, consumerism, mourning, and fusion, to canvass the ways Asian American adolescents "challenge and revise their cultural legacies and experiment with alternative

ethnic affiliations through their relationship to food”, which along with being a signifier of ethnicity, remains a key element in the process of acculturation (Ho 3).

Xu’s work provides a paradigm wherein one can explore the relevance of food in relation to the self. Her analysis of a few Asian American works, moves beyond the trope of food from the opposition of first versus second generation of immigrants. In a progressive argument, Xu underlines the lapse in Benedict Anderson’s concept of community as he ignores to consider the community’s foodways as a necessary unit to build the sense of imagined community (Xu 3). Throughout the book she studies the relationship of the self to food and justifies that we not only build our identities through eating, but are also devoured by our identities. Xu also addresses the redundant charges of self-exoticism or food pornography as she points out that immigrant foodways are the very sites of socio-economic and political struggle (Xu 14).

Mannur’s *Culinary Fictions* fills the much-needed space for studying food tropes in the South Asian diasporic literature. She argues that “Indianness” is mostly interpreted in terms of culinary idioms as food is considered “an intractable measure of cultural authenticity” (Mannur 3). She questions the lack of representations of South Asian bodies, even though the culinary images of South Asia are visible in multicultural settings. Her book pays critical attention to the underbelly of the South Asian diaspora, which is constituted by the working class, the voiceless, and also the queer, whose plight remain mostly unregistered. She talks of immigrants’ intricate relation to food both as an “intellectual” as well as an “emotional anchor” and as an area of cultural negotiation, both inside and outside of home, which additionally paves way for the inevitable racism they face as a part of their daily lives. She puts forward the concept of “culinary citizenship” as a means for the diaspora to “claim and inhabit certain identitarian positions via their relationship to food” as she examines her selected works to reveal a path through which immigrants’ issues related to gender, sexuality, class, and race can be theorised alternatively (29). She critiques the constricting practice of labeling South Asian novels as mere “commodity-comestibles” (21) and instead reveals the presentation of hard-hitting reviews of racism and capitalism in the United States in such works of literature. The vogue in fusion cuisine is also examined to understand the intricacies of U.S. multicultural and racial discourses.

Uma Narayan's book *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third-World Feminism* (1997) also talks about the part "cuisine" plays in the consolidation of nation and national identity, the propagation of "ethnic cuisines" which involves forms of food colonialism and culinary imperialism, and the various expressive forms through which the diaspora relates to food.

Parama Roy's *Alimentary Tracts: Appetites, Aversions, and the Postcolonial* (2010) is one of the many few works that directly places the trope of food along with the motifs of disgust, abstention, dearth, and appetite, at the very heart of Indian colonial history and postcolonial development. This way she examines the alimentary challenge aroused by colonialism and interprets the multiple meanings that can arise from the use of culinary rhetoric. She argues that, the alimentary tracts of colonisers, Indian nationalists, diasporic persons, and others in the colonial and postcolonial world orders, functioned as an important somatic, psychoaffective, and ethicopolitical contact zone, through which questions of identification, desire, difference, social responsibility and most importantly subalternity, were frequently disseminated. Roy interprets the fundamentals of colonial and postcolonial making and unmaking by critiquing the "alimentary tract", which is a "fiercely policed" and "hotly trafficked" (24) boundary governing consumptive operations. Most importantly Roy refutes Gandhi's ideals of abstinence in his choice of vegetarianism and stresses that it was rather fraught with violence and ambiguity. She also examines the ironical "extremities of appetites" whereby gastronomic abundance and scarcity are conterminously staged, and the implications it bears for the Indian imagination, as the nation moves from the limitations of a colonial past to the adequacy of the postcolonial present (Roy 26). In addition to Mannur's study of culinary authenticity, Roy examines the idiom of "culinary corruption" as she reveals that Madhur Jaffrey even with her "sanitized diasporic vision of spices" fails to defeat the British adherence to and approximation of curry (Roy 28).

William R. Dalessio in *Are We What We Eat? Food and Identity in Late Twentieth-Century American Ethnic Literature* (2012) is another extensive work on the formation and transformation of identity as seen through the context of food consumption. Aligned with the present demand, Dalessio examines the experiences of third-generation ethnic immigrants in America as they endeavor to revive their cultural connections through imaginative or physical revisitations, specifically through cooking and consuming ethnic

foods. Notably, the author debunks the frequently quoted cliché of “you are what you eat”, and posits that one’s descent is prioritised over individual consent or choice of identity. Furthermore, Dalessio highlights that the significance of food and its consumption undergoes transformation based on the contextual shifts (164).

Charlotte Boyce and Joan Fitzpatrick’s *A History of Food in Literature: From the Fourteenth Century to the Present* (2017) analytically connects canonical and non-canonical texts from as far as the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The book seeks to problematise the very division between the savage and the civilised as it examines the trope of voluntary and involuntary cannibalism, which according to Margaret Visser remains “the most fearful choice of consumption” (11). Additionally, the authors emphasise the fact that food being a foreign element is also a potent element to destabilise one’s identity by blurring the dimensions between the self and the other. They also consider the troubled place of sugar in ancient and colonial history and trace the degenerating journey of simple consumables as they are converted to commodities. All in all, the book tries to put forward a comprehensive overview of food in literature since the fourteenth century, and in this way carves out a new path for literary food scholars, all the while challenging the practice of relegating identity to food consumption.

Utsa Ray’s *Culinary Culture in Colonial India: A Cosmopolitan Platter and the Middle-Class* (2014) provides an extensive study of food cultures in colonial Bengal; the changes in agricultural production and peasant economies; the new culinary activities undertaken due to colonial modernisation, which transformed the culinary culture of India. Using Bourdieu’s theory on the relationship between taste, class, and bourgeoisie identity, Ray’s book studies the influence of food and changing dietary habits among the self-fashioned Bengali middle class or upper-caste consciousness. She argues that the gradual development of Bengali cuisine into a hybrid cosmopolitan platter was facilitated through gender negotiations as “a distinct image of women was created and linked to the creation of a refined taste” (22). Ray uses archival sources from the colonial period to study the ambiguity in Bengali cuisine, which can be witnessed in its endeavour to retain its regionality and domesticity, although cosmopolitanism has entered the Bengali fare.

The works reviewed above can be quite helpful in stimulating one’s interest in conducting literary food studies. Each author offers a variety of intriguing perspectives on the metaphorical, corporeal, and ontological connotations that accompany food and its

consumption. However, there are several areas where these works fall short, when we consider the use of food in Indian English fiction. For instance, Ho and Xu's works have a narrow focus and limited analysis of the complex cultural practices and beliefs surrounding food, among Asian Americans. Xu focuses mainly on the association of food among Chinese Americans, while Ho limits her scope to East Asian and Southeast ethnic groups, such as Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, and Korean. Thus, both these works do not consider the complexities of South-Asian ethnicity. Dalessio's work, which is restricted to late twentieth-century American ethnic literature, offers an intriguing perspective on how identity is formed by referencing the characteristics of cooking and eating, but it can only be used in a generic sense in the thesis. Boyce and Fitzpatrick's book solely references Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* which is insufficient for the readers of Indian English literature. Alternatively, Mannur and Uma Narayan focus on most of the dietary issues faced by the South Asian diasporas. However, to fully comprehend the ramifications of the diaspora, it is necessary to pay closer attention to the region of origin and the way immigrants behave when they return to their native countries. Although Indian history and cuisine serve as inspiration for Parama Roy's writing, her work contains just a scant analysis of Indian fiction. To that end, her work ignores other famous Indian writers who directly or subtly address the same, limiting itself to the fictions of Mahasweta Devi, Salman Rushdie, Sara Suleri, and Madhur Jaffrey. Regarding Utsa Ray's book, although Bengal plays a significant role in the history of Indian cuisine, the consequences of colonial modernisation on the cuisines of rest of the nation cannot be overlooked, and this aspect is ignored in the book, despite its broad title.

Even non-literary works, such as Colleen Taylor Sen's *Feasts and Fasts: A History of Food in India* (2014) provides a comprehensive study of a number of Indian foods, falls short to essentially capture the nuances of studying food in India. Throughout the book, she examines India's history of economy, agriculture, rituals, religious trends, culinary developments and the links between diet, health, and medicine from the prehistoric eras to the present times, in order to trace the Indianness of Indian foods. Although she attempts an exhaustive summation, her work fails to consider the havoc caused by the introduction of cash crops, thereby commercialising agriculture; or the introduction of new land revenues- criteria which ensured the efficient exploitation and drainage of the Indian economy. The actual location or character of the kitchen in domestic household which is



the cradle of power, and the way it impacted the eater, is also ignored in favour of the discussions on wealthy and royal kitchens.

Keeping such lacunae in mind the thesis attempts to discuss the numerous ways food might be used in relation to socio-literary concepts and the colonial and postcolonial developments in India. The thesis would address the construction of hunger among Indians, during the colonial reign and explore the messages that the absence of food encodes. The thesis will also explore the ambiguous ways Gandhi's dietary ideals were comprehended by the general populace. The thesis would also explore the nuances of cooking and consumption in the spaces of both enclosed and open kitchens, and attend to the alternate language of food by analysing the implications of disordered eating and cannibalism. The thesis would explore the reasons behind the invisibility of Dalit food in mainstream literature. Additionally, the thesis would analyse the creolisation of Indian food among the Old Indian diaspora, and among other things would also attend to the complexities that entail an immigrant's return home.

### **Chapter Plan**

The dissertation consists of five chapters apart from the Introduction and Conclusion. Each chapter traces the expressive ability of food, consumption and hunger and the way they are represented in the select works of fiction.

Chapter 1, "Theorising Food", presents a concise study, tracing the origin of food studies from anthropology and other related areas, to its rapidly developing state as a full-fledged discipline. It explores how broader theoretical practises might accommodate the study of food, which further can assist in interpreting the use of food in literature. Thus, it examines the crucial ideas on food, put forward by various key thinkers such as Lévi-Strauss, Mary Douglas, Roland Barthes, Mikhail Bakhtin, among others. This chapter situates the discourse of food in India, in relation to socio-literary concepts such as culinary imperialism, colonial modernity, subaltern self-fashioning, economic concepts of capital accumulation and laws of entitlement, famine theories and artificial food scarcities, theories of underdevelopment, biopolitics of the body and the nation, gender theories, culinary creolisation, and diaspora theories. In short, the chapter provides a radical re-reading of some contemporary theories, which when employed in the reading of the select texts, reveals many gaps, where, research needs to be conducted.

Chapter 2, “Colonial Modernity, Culinary Imperialism and the Construction of Hunger”, problematises the discourse of colonial modernity by exploring the subtleties of culinary imperialism and the construction of hunger in colonial India. The chapter explores the way Indian cuisine entered the colonisers' diets not due to the conquering forces of culinary imperialism but as a result of domestic interactions between memsahibs and Indian servants. Additionally, the chapter examines India's ambiguous response to the forces of culinary imperialism through the subaltern self-fashioning of taste. The chapter also examines hunger as the most visible imperial motif, which haunted the Indians throughout the colonial rule. It explores the way poor people derived nourishment from unusual items during periods of scarcity. The novels selected for this chapter include Bhabani Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers!*, Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve*, Mulk Raj Anand's *Coolie*, and Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*, since they examine the subjectivities of hunger among Indians as mediated through the capitalistic appetites of the colonial empire.

Chapter 3, “Food as Self-Discipline: A Study of Gandhian Morality” explores Gandhi's use of food and fasting as moral instruments for self-control and nonviolent resistance. Gandhi's teachings on food and body are notable for their ability to manipulate and attract people towards the national struggle for freedom. It gave rise to a particular dietary philosophy that had a profound impact on Indian politics, society, theories, and literature. It also gained a significant place in the Indian psyche and generated a discourse all on its own. To understand Gandhian dietetics, the chapter examines his works on food such as *Diet and Diet Reform*, *The Moral Basis of Vegetarianism*, *A Guide to Health*, and his autobiography, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. The novels selected for this chapter include Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*, R. K. Narayan's *The Vendor of Sweets*, *The Guide*, and *The Dark Room*, since they present the various perspectives that the public had on Gandhi's dietary politics. These novels also critique Gandhi's dietetic ideologies and experiments, and his necessary irrationalism in countering colonial discourse, which contributed to India's preparation for liberation.

Chapter 4, “The Politics of Food in the Domestic Realm: Restrictions and Resistances” traces the politics of food in the domestic domain. This chapter problematises the assumed gender and class discriminations, in order to comprehend the daily politics entailed in our meals. It studies Easterine Kire's *A Terrible Matriarchy*, Kiran Desai's

*Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, Bama's *Sangati: Events* and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. It examines different spaces of the kitchen inside and outside the household, and between different sections of the Indian society. Through the ways in which women prepare and consume food, the chapter examines the intricate construction of femininity and the reinforcement of hegemonic submission in Indian society. It also studies the play of normativity as well as of non-normativity or resistance, as staged through the acts of cooking and consumption. The chapter also analyses food and food-work as viable avenues for making women's work visible and for overcoming patriarchal restrictions.

Chapter 5, "Food and the Indian Diaspora" explores food as a tool of identity negotiation, among the diaspora. It explores the nuances of gastronomic boundaries in adopted lands, where food is used for the double-edged task of assimilation and categorisation. It traces the experiences of the underprivileged among the diaspora, and the narratives of return migration and nostalgia for the foreign land. It examines the various levels of consumption, including literal, alternate, and hyperreal consumption. It is not only limited to personal kitchen of the diaspora, but also forays into professional kitchens, where migrants play the part of "cultural brokers" (Mannur 137). The novels analysed in this chapter are Amitav Ghosh's *River of Smoke* and *Flood of Fire*, Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*, Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, since they portray the intricacies of culinary nationalism, gastronomic boundaries, hybridity and liminality.

## **Relevance**

Mary Douglas has often talked about the compartmentalisation and neglect towards food studies in the early 1980s (qtd. in Passariello 65). It has been four decades since Douglas made this comment, yet it is unfortunate that academics involved in food studies in literature still find themselves needing to justify their interest in this field and the significance of such studies. According to Mannur's observation, "some literary and cultural critics remain ambivalent about the status of "food studies"" (Mannur 10). Given this mindset, it is not surprising that there has not been a significant corpus of work exploring the representation of food in Indian Writing in English. To fill this lacuna, this study highlights food's importance and legitimacy in our critical thought processes, by reading the culinary as a potent discursive space where cultural, psychological, ethnic,

racial, and emotional aspects can be subtly encoded.

The choice of close reading as a major methodology seems to be the only compatible choice in order to derive fruitful and comprehensive answers for the problems that have been undertaken. As food in literature is not simply reflective but also productive and transformative, the theoretical approach adopted for the analysis of literary foods is also a transformative one. It is open to the involvement of multidisciplinary, self-reflexivity and alternative theories, as an unbiased and comprehensive literary approach “often leads a critic in various theoretical directions that sometimes converge or diverge on the terms the text dictates” (Xu 17). Now that theory has itself become fragmented and purportedly dead (Fredric Jameson), close reading and application of multiple approaches as necessary, seems to be the only way to save literary analysis from being mere “testing grounds for theories and political positions”, whereby literary texts are but simply “colonised” (Xu 16). The selected novels represent different social aspects of the country and studying them through the lens of food, reveals the varying notions and concepts regarding food and its national, socio-political, economic and historical implications; the way it is presented literally; and the effects it has on the writers and readers alike; their identities and their voiced and unvoiced articulations, thus contributing to the limited corpus of critical writings on this area.