

CHAPTER ONE

THEORISING FOOD

Introduction

Although food, cooking and eating are universal experiences, a serious theoretical study has been long overdue. Occasional outbursts of philosophical ideas on food only began to appear from the 1960s, and according to Anita Mannur, until the publication of James W. Brown's 1984 text, *Fictional Meals and their Function in the French Novel, 1789–1848*, there were hardly any critical books on literary food studies (Mannur 12). Some remarkable trends of thoughts on food were generated from different academic schools such as the semiotic, structuralist, cultural/carnivalesque and the symbolic. In 1961, Roland Barthes pronounced food products as “institutions”, that “necessarily imply, a set of images, dreams, tastes, choices, and values”, thus bringing in focus the multidimensionality of food (23). Further, Barthes demonstrates the arena of signification and communication generated by food, as he says, “Substances, techniques of preparation, habits, all become part of a system of differences in signification; and as soon as this happens, we have communication by way of food” (25). In the year 1965, Bakhtin in his book, *Rabelais and His World*, attested utmost importance to the activity of eating, by suggesting that eating helps in the transgression of bodily limits as it enables one to swallow and devour the world, thereby making the world a part of oneself (Bakhtin 317). Bakhtin's discourse on food was developed at a time when food had no place in the theoretical sphere. His ideas on consumption along with his discourse of the language of laughter, the material body, and the carnival can be seen as the means by which he mocked and attempted to subvert everything that is hegemonic, powerful, institutional, and ideological. He focuses mostly on the social aspects of banquets, that serve as a medium for the temporary suspension of everyday routines and the observation of festive occasions that are marked by dialogic interchange, temporary liberation of social and hierarchical boundaries, subversion of authority and the nurturance of community ties and collective spirit. His views on eating, puts one's attention beyond the body's surface, and into the body's depths and illuminates the processes of “interchange” and “interorientation” that routinely occur from the moment of ingestion to the moment of defecation (Bakhtin 317). Thus, eating initiates the process of overcoming bodily boundaries between the world and the self (Bakhtin 317). Bakhtin makes it clear how eating generates the feeling of strength and victory of the mundane, material self on the face of the official, restrictive world. In

Bakhtin, eating becomes an open-ended exercise, that reveals alternative voices and alternative ways of living. A year later, 1966, to be precise, Claude Lévi-Strauss validated the study of the culinary when he declared cooking as “a truly universal form of human activity”, as important and as common as our language (Lévi-Strauss 40). Lévi-Strauss attached special importance to the exercise of cooking, as it is a cultural process of transforming food, and therefore has the ability to translate the structure of any given society or even to reveal its contradictions (Lévi-Strauss 41, 47). Years later in a personal communication with Phyllis Passariello, Mary Douglas had reportedly 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). These authors can be considered as the inaugurators of food studies as they stressed the importance of studying food, as cooking and eating are universal human experiences.

While these writers held various explicit theoretical positions, theory in general can also accommodate the study of food across disciplines. Being a matter of interdisciplinary concern, the subject of food can derive several useful principles from different theoretical schools. In “Edible Écriture” Terry Eagleton equates food to the post-structuralist text, and says that “food is endlessly interpretable, as gift, threat, poison, recompense, barter, seduction, solidarity, suffocation” (Eagleton). Similarly, in the present era of post-theory, the interpretation of food is even more endless as it continues to derive ideas from numerous disciplines. A part of material culture, food studies, is interdisciplinary in nature and closely reflects the features of cultural studies, a field that Toby Miller classifies as a “tendency across disciplines, rather than a discipline in itself” (vii). Since food studies finds its place among the intersections of multiple disciplines, its derivations are as varied as the disciplines that contribute to it. It is then not surprising that food can be interpreted in numerous ways according to the tools of theory one wishes to apply. The critical reading of food can be classified according to one’s preferred theoretical position, reading themes and methodologies, but owing to its ambiguous technicality, any interpretation of food will always be subject to convergence.

Studying food narratives becomes especially interesting as food often functions as a rhetorical device whereby it does not need to identify itself per se, but it rather works to intrinsically persuade the fictional characters and readers alike, even while it may remain invisible. Burke in his book *A Rhetoric of Motives* (1969), says the “key term” or main

function of rhetoric is not "identification," but persuasion" (xiv), which functions through our word usage, "to form attitudes or to induce actions in other human agents" (43). Food and its rhetoric are also persuasive, but they work almost invisibly, as the "edible units of signification" (Dalessio 4). For instance, cooking and eating are frequently viewed as routine, practical affairs, which further illuminates the ideological context in which they function. Examining the role of food as an ideological apparatus is essential as it contributes to the meaningful sustenance of socio-cultural structures (Littlejohn 34). This as a result calls forth our attention to the rhetoric of food as a tool to explore the politics of narration and explain the human experience that it seeks to truthfully represent. Before going into the analysis of literary food studies, the following paragraphs would attempt to briefly chart out the inception and overall development of the field of food studies.

The Rise of Theoretical Approaches to Food

Nineteenth century anthropologists on food were mostly interested in food's association with "taboo, totemism, sacrifice and communion" (Mukhopadhyay 157). Notable works from this period include James Frazer's articles on taboo and totemism, written in the year 1886 for the ninth edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, which among other things, also dealt with the prohibition of particular food among different tribes around the world (Mukhopadhyay 157). Many tribes believed that they were the descendants of totem animals and therefore the preservation of such animals was of great importance. As such their food habits were governed by abstinence from the consumption of totem animals. Such food taboos, Frazer derived, sought to ensure the conservation of the tribe and the individual. Other anthropological writers around this time who lent their voices to the importance of studying food habits, dining manners and culinary recipes include Garrick Mallery, William Robertson Smith, Frank Hamilton Cushing, Franz Boas and Helen Codere (Mintz and Du Bois 100).

The turn of twentieth century saw the rise of strong theoretical and systematic approaches leading to a serious anthropological study of food. Ellen Messer in her comprehensive paper "Anthropological Perspectives on Diet" (1984) identifies three major areas related to food, that historically captured the attention of anthropologists- the environmental and commercial availability of foods, the edibility and preference of foods as governed by distributional policies, and the nutritional outcomes of specific cultural consumption practices (Messer 205). She further states that British social anthropologists

engaged in studying the pre-World War II colonial Africa, discovered that, “the study of food and hunger were basic to their understandings of social relationships, political life, and changing cultures disrupted by British rule” (Messer 208). Around the same time a few American anthropologists belonging to the “culture and personality” school began to study the cultural and psychosocial relation to food which later paved the way for the study of food anxieties (Messer 211). Food shortage, practical as well as superstitious attempts at food conservation, restraining and indulging alimentary practices were some of the topics analysed during this period by anthropologists like A. Kardiner, C. DuBois, D. N Shack, W. Shack, B. Malinowski, A.R. Holmberg and others (Messer 209, 244-245). Additionally, the world wars have provided an impetus to the study of food insecurities such as food shortages, rationing, inevitable dietary modifications, and resultant nutritional deficiencies- examining which anthropologists like Vargas and Tanner, aimed to ascertain its impact on eating experiences and seek explanations for the causes of diet related illness (Mintz and Du Bois 104-105). As such the study of food during 1930-1940s was largely contributed by American social psychological anthropologists.

Recent feminist debates on eating disorders such as bulimia, anorexia nervosa, which are mostly related to women, seem to derive their inspiration from the studies conducted in this period. In the near future, such feminist studies were to contribute a lot to food studies, so as to bring out a major explosion to the validity and necessity of studying the genre. Post World War II necessitated the economic reconstruction of war-ravaged countries so as to foster the developing nations. Therefore, this era saw the emergence of ecological and materialist studies in anthropology which examined the ecology of food production, dietary content, nutrition, dietary change, motion of energy through the food chain, foraging activities, biological and sociocultural outcomes of dietary practices.

Starting from the 1960s, semiotic studies succeeded in bringing a revolutionary turn not only in food anthropology, but also lent a much needed “kick” to the legitimate genre of food studies. Studying food was then not only limited to anthropology, but also marked its entry in the sphere of structuralism, sociology, literature, cultural studies, history, philosophy, psychology and classicism. Counihan and Esterik in their book *Food and Culture: A Reader* lists three major reasons that furthered the growth of food studies- feminist researches, food politics and food related social movements, as well as the extreme attraction and relativity of food studies itself (2). Interestingly though, while

feminist research contributed a lot to the study of food, Wenying Xu in her book *Eating Identities* (2008) notes that gendered conventions were one of the prime reasons for the prolonged academic ignorance as “food, in its materiality and dailiness, persists in being associated with the mundane and feminine” (Xu 173). There was also prevalent a philosophical “split” between body and mind, as Xu and Curtin remark, which further curtailed early interest in the study of food (Xu 4). The following sections would briefly touch upon some of the fundamental theorists from different fields of study, who did not strictly define themselves as food writers, but did majorly contribute to the foundation and development of food studies.

Theoretical Aspects of Food

It was Lévi-Strauss who for the first time brought food preparation at the centre of serious scholarly attention as he highlighted the universal association between food, culture and meaning. His tetralogy *Mythologiques* consist of *Le Cru et la cuit* (1964; translated as *The Raw and the Cooked*, 1970); *Du Miel aux cendres* (1966; *From Honey to Ashes*, 1973); *L'Origine des Manières de Table* (1968; *The Origin of Table Manners*, 1978); and *L'Homme nu* (1971; *The Naked Man*, 1981) (J. Fox 299). These books present Lévi-Strauss's structural study of myths as he applies Saussure's theories of structural linguistics to the field of anthropology. According to Lévi-Strauss, “empirical categories—such as the categories of the raw and the cooked, the fresh and the decayed, the moistened and the burned, etc.” can be “used as conceptual tools with which to elaborate abstract ideas and combine them in the form of propositions” (*Raw* 1). Lévi-Strauss's study of myths was driven by the desire to reveal the laws and mechanisms of logic in tangible qualities (*Raw* 1). By his extensive studies on mythologies, he derived that the journey of humans to a cultural state is dictated not by conscious invention of laws but by the already present structures of the human brain. The tetralogy occupies an important position among food anthropologists, as it suggests that cooking is “the transformative means that marks the transition from nature to culture” (J. Fox 300). Similarly, his classic structuralist article “The Culinary Triangle”, equates cooking with language and culture, as he presents the “triangular semantic field” of food, where the three angles stand for “the raw, the cooked and the rotted” states of edible substances (41). Lévi-Strauss's culinary triangle presents the universal “opposition between nature and culture” where food acts as an object of transformation either by culture or by nature into its respective cooked or rotten stages (41). Lévi-Strauss's argument helped anthropologists to explore the “codes” of food that

are preserved in myths and are retold through the language of cooking, whether done for daily or ritualistic purposes (Messer 223). As Messer suggests, food codes govern the mechanism of food preparation and exchange, and it intrinsically regulate our daily lives as well as the organisation of the society (Messer 223). For instance, in the book *Totemism*, Lévi-Strauss traces the hierarchy of clans of the Trobriand society, based on the food eaten by its representative animals, such as the dog of the Lukuba clan, and the pig of the Malasi clan: “The dog and the pig began to wander here and there; the dog found a fruit on the ground, from the noku tree, sniffed it, and ate it. Then the pig said to the dog: “You have eaten *noku*, you have eaten filth, you are of low birth. I shall be the chief”” (*Totemism* 62). As Lévi-Strauss further explains, the fruit of the noku is considered as an inferior food and is eaten only in times of scarcity, and those who eat inferior food are considered of an inferior rank in the society (*Totemism* 62). This is true even in the contemporary times. For instance, in India, the Dalits belong to the lowest section of the society, and have been historically ostracised for their ‘inferior’ eating habits, born out of poverty. However, culinary myths also preserve the collective information of alternative sources of nutrition that can be consumed during times of scarcity (Messer 224). The novels *So Many Hungers!*, *Nectar in a Sieve* and *Sangati: Events* present a few instances of food scarcity where the characters adopt alternative sources of nutrition from inferior food or non-food items.

While Lévi-Strauss was more interested in the study of universal mental structures, Mary Douglas made “everyday reality the centerpiece of her investigations” (Wuthnow et al. 77). Douglas felt semantics to be too abstract for her purpose, and therefore, she fortified her approach by focusing on both the particularities and the generalities of social relations (Passariello 56). Douglas’s approach echoes the postulates of post theory as she merges the quotidian and the ordinary like “dirt, food, bodies, jokes, material possessions, and speech” with “the special, the scientific and the sacred” (Wuthnow et al. 77; Passariello 59). Her assessment of the relation between cross-cultural symbols, ideas of hygiene and ritual pollution, and foodways are well known, where among other things, she also pays close attention to the study of materialism and symbolism. One of her major contributions to food studies is her derivation that cultural symbols are not arbitrary and neither limited to a fixed set of structural universality, but vary across cultures (Passariello 55). Thus, even though ethnographic details and meanings may vary, food is bound to possess a universal cultural function. Douglas’s well-known essay, “Deciphering a Meal”

(1972), considerably broadens our understanding of food as she reveals the wide range of meanings encoded by food: “If food is treated as a code, the messages it encodes will be found in the pattern of social relations being expressed. The message is about different degrees of hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries, and transactions across the boundaries ... Food categories therefore encode social events” (Douglas 61). According to Douglas social events are coded by the meals of a society which are in turn encoded by a “complex series of syntagmatic associations” (Douglas 61, 65). Douglas criticises Lévi-Strauss’s search for pre-coded and universal food meanings, as he tends to ignore the “small scale social relations” which sustain and generate the food codes (Douglas 62). Lévi-Strauss’s principle of binary analysis, such as the raw and the cooked, or the idea of nature vs culture, is also criticised as he fails to provide any technique to assess the relative value of binary pairs, when applied to the patterns of daily food consumption (Douglas 61). Instead, she upholds the study of “syntagmatic relation” of food categories- the “chain” which patterns the elements of meals. She follows Halliday’s linguistic reasoning that, “Eating, like talking, is patterned activity” (Halliday 277), whereby eating rituals and “food elements can be ranged until they are all accounted for either in grammatical terms, or down to the last lexical item” (Douglas 62).

Douglas insists on studying the theme of repeated analogies as a way to decipher the meaning of everyday meals, as she believes that consumption patterns being the subsystems of culture, would yield a greater understanding of the superstructure of culture if examined (Passariello 58). She also worked extensively on the concept of hygiene, ritual pollution and cultural ideologies. Her book *Purity and Danger* (1966), was inspired by observing the “pollution behaviour” of the Brahmin sociologist M.N. Srinivas, and the Jew ethnologist, Franz Steiner (Douglas, *Purity*, vii). She observes the dietary rules, rituals and taboos of different cultures, such as the Lele, in the Congo, and derives that the ideas of cleanliness and pollution sustain the social order of a society and give meaning to its collective experiences. As Douglas remarks, “rituals of purity and impurity create unity in experience ... By their means, symbolic patterns are worked out and publicly displayed. Within these patterns disparate elements are related and disparate experience is given meaning” (Douglas, *Purity*, 2-3). Pollution beliefs carry social meanings and are most visible in religious beliefs and dietary laws. Dietary laws for instance, signify the hierarchy of the social system of a culture, where eating tabooed foods are seen as transgression. Douglas’s ideas can be easily applied to the Indian society where the Dalits are denied any

position in the social hierarchy and are rather placed outside the normative caste system as they consume tabooed foods such as offal, dead cattle and other such things. Since the food they eat are considered as “dirty”, any transaction with them has been seen as polluting and transgressive and therefore a threat to the social order. In her interpretation of Jewish dietary laws, Douglas notes that the laws of prescription and proscription accord the sense of “oneness, purity and completeness” among its members (Douglas, *Purity*, 58). Each meal therefore reinstates the sense of “holiness and order”, and further “symbolizes the cultural order” (Passariello 55). Through her study she opposes the evolutionary scheme of human culture as forwarded by James Frazer, that seemingly reeks of his contempt towards primitive societies (*Purity* 24). She challenges his assumption that “confusion between uncleanness and holiness is the distinctive mark of primitive thinking” and rather insists that “ideas about purity and pollution are in fact structurally similar cross-culturally” (Douglas, *Purity* 24; Passariello 54). Thus, she largely opposes the western ideas of pollution and insists that pollution behaviour differ according to the history and context of the society. Her book *Risk and Culture* (1982) with Aaron Wildavsky, suggests that ideas of pollution, dietary taboos, and other such ideological fears are regulated not by natural causes or logical reasoning, but by cultural biases (Passariello 54). The critic Phyllis Passariello, describes Douglas as a “constructive thinker”, who paid great attention to the mundane details of daily life, while also keeping a steady focus on the larger picture (Passariello 69). Thus, Douglas’s approach and her theories remain novel and way ahead of her time, and certainly contribute a lot to food studies.

Food studies, especially in literature has remained indebted to Roland Barthes’s idea of the symbolic and semiotic function of foodways. The ability of food to act as a means of communication and signification, has remained as one of his famous arguments in his essay “Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption”. Barthes’s idea of food is repeatedly quoted in articles about food, as he describes food as “a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behavior” (Barthes 24). Most importantly, he brings to light the sense of triviality and guilt that has traditionally surrounded the subject of food, hindering its serious study (Barthes 23–24). He also talks about how culture influences and shapes contemporary food consumption, and food in turn, defines different social situations or events.

Barthes talks about the “collective imagination” of a society which is heavily controlled by the advertisements of certain brands, food choices, and modes of

consumption, that influences the mental framework of its members (Barthes 24). Whereas he applies this theory to analyse the changing tastes among the French middle-class, the same approach can be employed for the Indian society as well. For instance, India is known for its high production, consumption and exportation of tea, a substance which was barely in use until the British cultivated a habit among its subjects, through the marketing campaigns of the Indian Tea Association (Collingham 188). Lizzie Collingham in her book *Curry: A Tale of Cooks and Conquerors* debunks the myth that the British acquired their tea-drinking habit from India: “it was the British who introduced tea to the Indians. Although they barely changed the way Indians eat, the British radically altered what they eat and drink” (Collingham 188). Till the beginning of the twentieth century most Indians were reluctant to drink tea and were even unaware of its recipe (Collingham 188). The habit was forced upon the Indians owing to the fact that the subcontinent could become the largest tea market, and derive immense profit for its ruler (Collingham 194). The Indian Tea Association sent special teams to demonstrate tea preparation in different parts of the country, and with the beginning of the First World War the habit of drinking tea was cultivated as a way of brief relaxation among the labourers working at the mines, mills and factories to produce supplies for the war. To quote Collingham, “tea entered Indian life as an integral part of the modern industrial world that began to encroach on India in the twentieth century” (195). The way tea has been advertised as an energising drink and introduced among the Indians alludes to the conscious construction of the tea-drinking myth in the modern world. In this narrative of tea consumption, tea works as a “functional unit of a system of communication” among the ruler and the ruled (Barthes 24). A similar narrative was constructed among the Indians regarding meat-eating and masculinity, as discussed in the Introduction. Specific food substances such as tea, meat, tinned food, signified power, modernity, and refinement of tastes, among the self-fashioned Indians, whereas the scarcity of food and inferior diet consisting of non-food items or leftover and discarded food items, signified economic and social discrimination meted out to the Dalits and other underprivileged Indians. Thus, Barthes is correct in his suggestion that different food items can convey meaningful information by acting as signs. He terms this differential system of signification as the “veritable grammar of foods” (25).

Barthes is accurate in his assertion that food can function as both a system of protocol and a source of nutrition. This would be exemplified in the second and third chapters, where food acts as a tool of subaltern self-fashioning as well as an instrument of

subversion, respectively. Further study of food in different situations also derive that food can act as an instrument of nostalgia for the diaspora, as would be discussed in the fifth chapter of this thesis. Similarly, Barthes's idea of the "spirit" of food can be employed in the study of the food habits among the Indian diaspora. Barthes suggests that "a coherent set of food traits and habits can constitute a complex but homogeneous dominant feature useful for defining a general system of tastes and habits" (26). Likewise, the Indian diaspora can be seen as engaging in culinary demarcation as they attempt to remake dishes from their past, attending to their culinary tastes and dietary habits. They invoke the "spirit" of food, so to say, in order to feed their nostalgic memories of home and maintain a sense of continuity with it. Food traits and habits also remain instrumental in the "culinary interorientation" among the early Indian coolies who settled in the overseas plantation colonies. Thus, Barthes's essay presents numerous points of departure through which the critical study of food can be furthered. This way he enlarges the scope of food studies and enables one to bring in the contexts of history, religion, society, class, and knowledge to the arena of food studies.

Situating the Discourse of Food through Literary and Social Theories

While theorists like Claude Lévi-Strauss, Mary Douglas, Roland Barthes, Mikhail Bakhtin contributed to the study of food, literary theories in general can also accommodate the discourse of food. The thesis explores four major themes with regards to the rhetoric of food and the politics of narration in Indian English fiction. Each thematic chapter employs a different set of literary and social theories to present various aspects of the social and the personal lives of the Indians and the Indian diaspora.

Rereading the history of imperialism and colonial modernity in India through the lens of food brings to light the artificial creation of hunger throughout the subcontinent. Whereas modernity was supposed to support individual autonomy, reason and freedom, the version of modernity that unfurled in India destroyed the organic social structure of the country. The colonial modernity thesis developed by Tani E Barlow illuminates the alternate version of modernity in East Asian countries, which has been concealed under the prevalence of Eurocentric narratives of modernism. The concept of colonial modernity fills the lacuna of modernist criticism by generating progressive ways of investigating the narratives of imperialism, colonialism, modernity and capitalism. Barlow says that colonial modernity is,

a way of posing a historical question about how our mutual present came to take its apparent shape, colonial modernity can also suggest that historical context is not a matter of positively defined, elemental, or discrete units- nation states, stages of development, or civilizations, for instance- but rather a complex field of relationships or threads of material that connect multiply in space-time and can be surveyed from specific sites. (6)

The questions raised by Barlow can also benefit the study of colonial discourse theories in India as the Indian context is no less complex than its East Asian counterparts. In par with Barlow, the chapter “Colonial Modernity, Culinary Imperialism and the Construction of Hunger” attempts to engage with the history of imperialism and colonial modernity in an alternate way. The study locates food as a subject of tension and transformation among the coloniser and the colonised, and traces the interrelated development of culinary imperialism and the construction of hunger in India. Culinary imperialism as discussed by the feminist scholar Uma Narayan and the researcher Tanfer Emin Tunc, developed on the myth that the food of the whites is superior than their colonised counterparts and its superiority should be maintained even in the colonies (U. Narayan 162, Tunc 6). Much like the civilising notion of colonialism, culinary imperialism rests on the play of power between the rulers and the ruled as it justifies the forceful appropriation of the subaltern through food (Tunc 6).

Similarly, the colonised bourgeoisie responded to colonialism and culinary imperialism by reimagining their subjectivities and refashioning their selves, during the period of the Indian renaissance. The concept of self-fashioning presented by the New Historicist, Stephan Greenblatt, can be applied to the study of the Indian renaissance, that characterised the latter half of the nineteenth century. However, contrary to the task of self-fashioning in sixteenth-century England, that imposed a rigid discipline upon the middle-class and the aristocrats with little to no room for exercising autonomy, renaissance self-fashioning in India opted for a middle path as Indians consciously appropriated the ideas of modernism in their own terms (Greenblatt 1; Utsa Ray 4-6; U. Narayan 170, 171). This is because the Indian nationalist project that was formulated around the same time, was based on the “ideological justification for the selective appropriation of western modernity” (P. Chatterjee 238). Patterns of subaltern self-fashioning can be identified through the study of food that intersected the space between the ruler and the ruled, as food and cuisine got embroiled in the cultural and politics of colonial life. Kiranmayi Bhushi

observes that, “In the colonial political discourse of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century India dietary practices and food habits were posited in a binary form – meat-eating as physically and intellectually superior and plant-eating as totally inferior” (11). This “growing debate on vegetarianism and non-vegetarianism”, ultimately, “became a surrogate commentary on the contrasting natures of Western and Eastern cultures” (J. Sengupta 82). In such an environment, fashioning of the self, became the need of the hour, and Indians were faced with the binaries of dietary and cultural choices. The result was colonial mimicry on the one hand by modernising their diets, as seen among the indigenous capitalist class, versus the dietary conservatism practiced by Gandhi and his followers.

Economic concepts and theories such as capital accumulation, credit system, revenue system, free market, commercialisation of agriculture, theories of famine, also has a lot to offer to the interpretation of literary food studies, especially during and about the colonial period. Interpretation of such economic concepts further enhance the literary device of food and its representation in literature. The thesis is informed by the ideas of the renowned economist Amartya Sen, as well as the ideas of critics like Parama Roy and Utsa Ray, as they engage in the discourse of food and famine during the colonial period in India. Scanning through the agricultural policies of the colonial state, it can be derived that farmers and coolies are the archetypal victims of this period, as they suffered the most at the hands of their archetypal oppressors such as native landlords, middlemen, and colonial authorities. Famines, frequent food shortages, consumption of nutritionally inferior food items became a part of the daily affair for agricultural labourers and coolies as they were forced to grow only commercial crops and cash crops to fatten the purse of the colonisers. This common motif of hunger becomes rather unsettling when we consider the fact that there was no remarkable shortfall in the production of subsistence crops like rice, but its scarcity was rather generated due to its transformation into a commercial crop, meant for export (Sen 58; Ray 28). Along these lines, Amartya Sen develops his famous “entitlement approach” as a challenge to the food-availability decline (FAD) approach, that was stereotypically reasoned as the central cause of all famines (Sen 45). Sen’s theory concentrates on “the ability of people to command food through the legal means available in the society”, whereas the inability generates starvation, even when the aggregate food production is stable (Sen 45). Sen observes how apart from India, food has been historically sucked out of famine-stricken regions such as Wollo in Ethiopia, Hunan in China, and countries like Bangladesh and Ireland, due to weaker entitlements and the

inability of its people to command food (Sen 161). Thus, the entitlement approach, “views famines as economic disasters, not as just food crises”, arising due to the capitalist characteristic of the market that respect entitlements rather than needs (Sen 162). Such economic disasters are not only limited to the period of famines but rather seep through the daily lives of the peasants, as hunger remains their constant companion and the frequent shortages of food generate both physical and mental desperation. Hunger also forces them towards further exploitation as they begin to engage as coolies and later on as indentured labourers, within and outside the country, thus increasing the underdevelopment of the nation, while themselves being treated as disposable labourers meant solely for the sake of colonial profit.

German sociologist Andre Gunder Frank’s dependency theory also talks about the generation of underdevelopment in underdeveloped countries, not due to the presence of archaic institutions or capital shortage, but due to “the very same historical process which also generated economic development: the development of capitalism itself” (Frank 9). Frank challenges the misconception generated by the contemporary theories influenced by Eurocentric narratives that ignore the histories of the underdeveloped countries and presume that their economic history is similar to the past stages of the developed countries (Frank 3). Such generalised assumption leads to errors in the development of theories regarding the capitalist economy. Rather, the essential difference lies in the fact that, “The now developed countries were never *underdeveloped*, though they may have been *undeveloped*” (Frank 4). The condition of underdeveloped countries is generated by its past and present interchange with the developed metropolitan countries and probably holds true for all underdeveloped countries that possess the colonial heritage. Frank almost echoes Gandhi’s philosophy that independence from capital and cultural diffusion can only initiate the development of underdeveloped countries.

The prevalent thesis of “dual economies” believes that capitalist connection developed the metropole whereas the lack of capitalist connection in the peripheries kept its development in abeyance (Frank 4). However, evidences, says Frank, suggest that the colonial capitalist system penetrated even in the seemingly isolated sectors of its colonies, facilitated by local intermediaries and the socio-economic atmosphere (Frank 5). Terming each developed areas as a metropole and its underdeveloped counterparts as a satellite, Frank identifies a “chain of constellations of metropolises and satellites”, that integrate all regions of colonised countries into the capitalist system in a chained sequence (Frank 6).

This connection generates a channel through which the resources can be drained as each satellite “serves as an instrument to suck capital or economic surplus out of its own satellites and to channel part of this surplus to the world metropolis of which all are satellites” (Frank 6). Frank’s model reveals the corrosive feature of capitalism and the way it has retarded the developing countries. He further examines the autonomous history of development of São Paulo and Brazil and derives that a weaker relation to metropole brings out better development as resources that are normally sucked out by capitalism are spared. In short, satellization structurally limits a region’s development, as, “the previous development ... of these regions is choked off or channeled into directions which are not self-perpetuating and promising” (Frank 11).

Frank’s theory becomes even more interesting when we consider the ill effects of World Wars in countries like India. Instead of the self-sufficient economy, free trade, foreign competition, industrial absorption of land, biased production, specialised agriculture such as mono crop economies entered the scenario and ensured that colonised countries like India work for the growth of colonial power while becoming dependent on it for their own survival. While it helped Europe to initiate the industrial revolution, the importation of cheap goods like textile or food crops like rice, to India, undermined the goods of the local market. Irrespective of their underdevelopment, these countries “once provided the life blood of mercantile and industrial capitalist development” (Frank 13). However, with the decline in the demand for their specialised products, such a sugar or even opium, their economy was destroyed and they disintegrated into underdevelopment (Frank 13).

If we consider opium as an instrument of biopower used against India and China, Foucault's concept of biopower offers intriguing points of departure for analysis. Although not food, opium was constructed as an agent of hunger and desire by the East India Company, that controlled and regulated the population of both India and China. In *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction*, Foucault explains biopower as the political control of human population, through a set of tailored categories, which include “anatomy-politics”, that disciplines the human body, and “bio-politics”, that regulates the biological processes of an entire population (Foucault, *History*, 139). Thus, biopower is a product of discipline, that attempts "to ensure, sustain, and multiply life, to put this life in order" (Foucault, *History*, 138). Similarly, the British imperial enterprise attempted to control the biological needs of the body by cultivating a certain kind of addictive desire

amongst its subjects in both India and China. In the book, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, Lisa Lowe states that for the East India Company, opium has been “more than simply an economic commodity” (Lowe 103). Opium was used as an instrument of discipline that “induced docility and dependence” and thus “targeted the biology of the Chinese population, constituting a very different form of governance than earlier modes of political dominance or territorial conquest” (Lowe 103). On the other hand, in India the production of opium targeted both the biology as well as the agroeconomics of the country. This was done through the intensive exploitation of the farmers and agricultural labourers by forcing them to cultivate poppies for the production of opium. As would be discussed in the second chapter, the cultivation of opium requires enormous time, rigorous labour and fertile lands that undermined the cultivation of traditional subsistence crops meant for survival. While the production of opium never faced any major setbacks, the reduction of subsistence crops frequently generated food scarcity among the poppy cultivators, making them further dependent on the colonial state (Bauer 3).

The idea of biopolitics is also visible in Gandhi’s experiments with food and fasting, that presents how the biopolitical life of the nation could be generated through the act of eating. Since what one eats is also governed by socio-politics and economics, the personal choices of food can be seen as a dialogue in the discourse of the nation, generated via the quotidian practices of consumption. Gandhi’s engagement with dietary control or “culinary discipline” (P. Roy, “Meat-eating” 62) reflects how it was shaped by the “collective imagination” (Barthes 24) of the prevalent colonial binary of vegetarianism and non-vegetarianism, as mentioned earlier. Gandhi’s vegetarianism developed not only due to the personal influence of his mother and his religion but also was shaped and cemented at large due to his connection with vegetarian people that he met during his three years’ stay in London. His idea of fasting and adoption of a bland, vegetarian diet, can be read as a functional language that sought to communicate at a common level, with his fellow countrymen. The nature of his diet is meagre, non-violent, easily available, and easily accessible by all, and it encourages the self-sustaining power of India’s traditional economy, as opposed to the forms of violence involved in the capitalist economic model of the West. Gandhi’s diet also asserted his personal stance on self-fashioning where the strengthening of the soul and the mind was prioritised as opposed to the discourse of ‘beef, biceps, and Bhagvadgita’ as prescribed by Vivekananda. Gandhi’s biopolitics regarding diet, fasting, *brahmacharya* and *satyagraha*, can be read as an alternative form of

governance that emphasises upon self-discipline to optimize the biology of its followers, in their subversion against the colonial order.

Gandhi's idea of self-governance and dietary control should not be confused with the commercial dietary discourse that are meant to boost self-esteem, but instead leads to body policing, and are a part of contemporary capitalist agenda. While contemporary dietary control blurs the line between subjectivity and subjection and constructs docile subjects of capitalism, who are concerned with weight maintenance and the desire to look a certain way, Gandhi's idea of self-control and dietary discipline was meant to uplift the individual and make them self-dependent (Cruikshank 92; Steinem).

Gender theory can also enhance the discourse of food in literature. The critical lens of gender lends an interesting aspect to the study of food by problematising our food culture. While eating can be considered as an act of exercising one's agency in the face of public as well as domestic politics, it should be noted that the ability to "command" food is ultimately governed by gender, and in India, also by caste disparity (Tompkins 9; Sen 45). However, while the issue of caste and food received much scholarly attention in India, food was hardly examined from the angle of gender. Applying gender theories to literary food studies reveal the gendered associations to food, such as the construction and reinforcement of gendered identities through food, the way food can act as an instrument of social control, the way both men and women relate to food and their body images, the way women resist oppression through cooking, serving, and eating, the way women present their creativity during the times of food scarcity and so on.

Theorists like Susan Bordo, Sandra Lee Bartky, Natalie Jovanovski, extensively engage with the relationship between food and the female body and the prevalence of body policing narratives. Bordo's book *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (1993), for instance, examines the cultural construction and reproduction of femininity through our bodies, that become "a medium of culture" being governed by "what we eat, how we dress, the daily rituals through which we attend to the body" (Bordo 165). She bases her arguments on the ideas of Mary Douglas, Pierre Bourdieu, and Michel Foucault, among many others, to present the body as a symbolic and metaphoric "text", upon which cultural constructs and gender configurations are inscribed, reinforced, and regulated (Bordo 165). Bordo views eating disorders as a part of the defense mechanism "against the "femaleness" of the body and a punishment of its desires", where desires

represent the female appetite, that they seek to deny (Bordo 8). Similarly, Natalie Jovanovski problematises the gendered ways women relate to food even within the contemporary rhetoric of women empowerment. Inspired by Cairns et al., she uses the concept of “food femininities” or the “gendered ways of relating to food”, to understand how women are culturally conditioned to relate food and their bodies, in a stereotypical manner (Jovanovski 4).

In other related contexts, feminist scholars like Arlene Kaplan Daniels and Silvia Federici, talk about the hegemonic neglect towards women’s performance of housework, that makes their labour undervalued and invisible. Silvia Federici’s book *Revolution at Point Zero* (2012) marks a revolutionary turn in gender studies as she uncovers how capitalism is largely dependent on domestic work and reproduction for its manpower but opts to normalise housework as a natural attribute of women. This way, capitalism exploits women’s labour through its unpaid domestic work structure and further perpetuates gender discrimination. Gender studies as such, problematise the idea of capitalism and sexism and lend a political viewpoint to explore how masculinities and femininities are negotiated in terms of food and food work.

However, as Arlene Voski Avakian and Barbara Haber in the book *From Betty Crocker to Feminist Food Studies* (2005) write, gender studies while dealing with food, tended to mostly focus on women’s eating disorders or studied their involvement in domestic spaces, but typically ignored cooking as an area of critical concern, “as if it were merely a marker of patriarchal oppression and, therefore, not worthy of attention” (2). Similarly, other disciplines like social anthropology, sociology, or agricultural studies “ignored or distorted what could be learned from and about women’s relationship to food practices” (Avakian, Haber 2). However, recent gender studies and especially feminist studies, present that the space of the kitchen and the act of cooking, are not simple tasks for survival but carry rather deeper meaning as they represent the struggle between power, powerlessness, voice and voicelessness. It is now well-known that gender and class carry different significances among men and women in their relation with food. Authors like Cairns et al., in the article “Caring About Food: Doing Gender in the Foodie Kitchen”, study the operation of gender politics in the kitchen of food loving people or foodies, and identify three major dimensions through which normative gender practices are buttressed or sometimes challenged. The three dimensions include food as means of deriving pleasure, serving food as a part of caring for the family, and knowledge and expertise in

the field of food (598). The article presents how women are generally associated with domesticity and nurturing through cooking, while men are associated with mastery and creativity. Similarly, women deriving pleasure from food and thereby redoing gender is enabled largely by their class privilege (599). Thus, gender theory in relation to food studies, presents the necessity of critiquing and challenging the gendered expectations in contemporary food culture, by which more equitable and inclusive food cultures can be generated.

In the context of gender discrimination, the kitchen serves as a fascinating arena where Foucault's concepts of "power relations" and "docile bodies" take on significant relevance. The gendered operation and perpetuation of power within the domestic sphere, become particularly pronounced in this space, offering valuable insights into how power dynamics shape and control individuals engaged in culinary activities. (Foucault, *Discipline*, 24, 135). The kitchen can be seen as a disciplinary institution just like the hospitals, schools, or prisons, that Foucault talks about. Here family members are directly involved in power relations with one another as discernible through the acts of cooking, serving, and eating, all of which carry gendered and political undertones, irrespective of time, place and culture. This idea would be explained further in the fourth chapter of this thesis.

Another captivating aspect of food studies emerges when exploring the experiences of the Indian diaspora in foreign settings and their lives upon returning to their homeland. In this context, diaspora theory presents a multitude of intriguing concepts that can be applied to interpret the significance of food in diaspora literature. The question of identity and its crisis, the sense of nostalgia and rootlessness, and the overwhelming difficulties of assimilation, are some pertinent issues that surround the study of diaspora. Instead of getting lost within the quagmire of its innumerable issues, the current work focuses on the material world of the diaspora. Material objects and artifacts work as tangible reminders of a group's shared history and thereby play an important part in expressing and maintaining their cultural identities. Stressing the importance of materiality, Philip Crang in his essay "Diasporas and material culture", writes that "diasporic identities and processes are forged through the production, circulation and consumption of material things and spaces" (139). Crang suggests three major outcomes arising out of the intersection of diaspora and material culture studies: first, it reveals the involvement of several agencies in the movement of things and cultures, second, it broadens our

understanding of the way diasporic communities function, and third, it provides “a welcome grounding” to diaspora studies that otherwise becomes a “free-floating cultural-political” discourse (143-144). The idea of materiality becomes a useful tool in the study of the food habits of the diaspora since, food is the most common medium through which diasporic communities create and maintain their cultural identities, or even challenge the traditional notions of national identity and cultural boundaries. Thus, the food habits of the diaspora has always been entangled with the issues of gastronomic boundaries, culinary creolisation, dietetic hybridisation, and so on. Similarly, Indian food had travelled all around the world with its citizens, and their interaction with the foreign culture has led to the creation of new dishes of food and even alternative techniques of cooking, in response to the resources available in its new location.

The concepts of creolisation in food, culinary authenticity, and “culinary citizenship”, provide further insight into the complexities of diasporic food culture. Professor Robin Cohen in the article “Social identities and Creolization” marks a strict difference between the characteristics of creolisation and diaspora. He says, “When creolization occurs, participants select particular elements from incoming or inherited cultures, endow these with meanings different from those they possessed in the original culture, and then creatively merge these to create new varieties that supersede the prior forms” (71). Creolisation, as Laurence Tibère notes, “acted as a matrix which integrated and absorbed but also gave and influenced in return, while generating new societies and new cultures” (87). Thus, the process of creolisation offers the possibilities of “fresh and creative beginnings”, where identities as well as the cultural spheres are reconstructed through mundane processes of living together, cooking, speaking, and so on (Cohen 71, Tibère 86–87). Creativity, versatility and ingenuity, are some of the features of creolisation which can be easily traced in the creole cuisines. For instance, the creole cuisine of Louisiana has been tremendously influenced by the cuisines of the Southern US, West Africa, Spain, France apart from carrying Amerindian influences. The last chapter traces the creole dishes from different parts of the world such as Trinidad, Mauritius, Fiji, South Africa, East Africa, and so on.

While creole cuisines can be read as symbols of ease with the migrants’ current place of residence, by dint of culinary “interorientation” as visible in the interchange and inclusion of food items, and the subsequent corrosion of old roots; the cuisine of the diaspora, by contrast, tends to evoke memories of homeland and attempts to maintain a

connection with it through the attempts at cooking and eating native dishes. This diasporic consciousness has given rise to what Anita Mannur terms as “culinary citizenship” (Mannur 29). Mannur’s theory of culinary citizenship can be used to examine the different ways diasporic characters formulate and express their identities in relation to food. While Mannur examines the intricacies of class and sexuality in relation to food, her ideas can be applied to understanding the construction and maintenance of gastronomic boundaries and dietary hybridity among the Indian diasporas and its influence over the Indians, as visible in the native’s approximation of foreign dishes. These ideas would be further discussed with reference to select texts in the last chapter.

Conclusion

The chapter has considered the serious study of food as a critical tool in the field of literature. Different theoretical schools have been considered to derive critical insights into the subject of food in literary studies. The chapter traces the initial ideas on food as generated by the schools of linguistics, anthropology, gender, history, and cultural studies, and also explores the various ways by which the study of food can be accommodated into general theoretical practices. This way, it attempts to relate the critical theoretical principles to the present aim of studying the rhetoric of food and the politics of narration in select Indian English fiction. Although food studies originated in the field of anthropology it has immensely benefited from semiotic studies, feminist studies, and food politics. The arena of food studies has further broadened with the ingress of literary theories. The chapter has explored the critical concepts generated by some fundamental theorists such as Lévi-Strauss, Mary Douglas, Roland Barthes, Mikhail Bakhtin, among many others. The chapter has further attempted to situate the discourse of food through socio-literary concepts, like that of culinary imperialism and colonial modernity, subaltern self-fashioning, the 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. Thus, all the major theories that would be employed in the next chapters are introduced in this chapter to generate the necessary space required for a detailed assessment of the upcoming topics.