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Consumption, Representation and
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Food Culture in India began more than four years ago with the conceptualization of a young researcher's conference which endeavoured to understand the sociocultural presence of Food Studies in Indian Academia. We invited papers that critically looked at various strands of a burgeoning and ever-expanding culture of gastronomy, culinary skills and alimentary cousins. The papers we received underscored how food cultures across the globe were pregnant with possibilities as their study stood at the crossroads of economics, biology, history, culture and literary studies. In these papers, discourses around identity, gender, class and globalization were being looked at from the prism of food cultures. While drafting paper panels and assessing these research essays, we realized that the purview of these theoretical discussions went beyond that of a conference, and we decided to work on a book project. We had a set of young scholars discussing food and making up an eclectic mix of voices with varying theoretical frameworks. This was the starting point in our journey to nourish this fruit of our collective labour.

We shared our interest with the editorial team at Springer Nature and especially Satvinder Kaur who helped us to cook these stimulating ideas and present it in its current form. We owe a great debt to the institutions we are affiliated to, i.e. Jamia Millia Islamia, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee College and Gargi College for their constant support. We thank all who in one way or another aided in the completion of this project.

Introduction

The interdisciplinary study of food has been dominated by “structuralist, culturalist and Gramscian approaches” (Ashley et al. 2004, p. 2). Within this tradition, notions of health and taste are conceptualized not as simple trans-historical choices, shaped in isolation, but ones with immense political and sociocultural import.

To elucidate, Roland Barthes in his seminal essay “Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption” writes “For what is food? It is not only a collection of products that can be used for statistical or nutritional studies. It is also, and at the same time, a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behaviour” (2013, p. 24). Thus, Barthes situates food at the crossroads of multiple disciplines such as visual culture, semiology, history, sociology and anthropology. It is no surprise then that the discussions on food have found such a vast expression in cultural studies which is conceptualized and defined by Toby Miller as a “tendency across disciplines, rather than a discipline in itself” (2001, p. 1).

Continuing the emphasis on the cultural and political import of food, Slavoj Žižek critiques the increasing phenomenon of “healthy lifestyle” (vis-à-vis organic food) calling its manifestation a symptom of “cultural capital”. Similarly, Pierre Bourdieu in his work *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1984) argues that taste is determined by the class one belongs to and when “embodied, helps to shape the class body” (34). Ben Highmore, on the other hand, breaks with this mould of analysis and in his study on taste revises both these positions. He rejects Bourdieu, who he says “was not actually interested in taste and rarely addressed its particular qualities” (Highmore 2016, p. 547) and also questions Žižek’s claim by stating that taste is “more than cultural capital, it is cultural power played out on a violently affective plane” (Highmore 2010, p. 125). For Highmore, it is the affective plane orchestrated by food and taste that reveals the most about any culture and society. Taking a cue from these theorists, this edited collection of essays seeks to chart many meanings that are generated by the preparation, consumption, representation and mediation of food. Since the study of food lies at the cross section of communication theory, media studies, affect theory, popular culture

and identity politics, its multidisciplinary nature has the potential to lead to creative research pathways in the area of food culture studies.

The interconnection of food and culture is marked by an interesting dualism. Bob Ashley, Joanne Hollows, Steve Jones and Ben Taylor hint towards this very dualism in their comprehensive study on *Food and Cultural Studies* when they go on to suggest that it is “the complex relationship between power structures of various kinds and human agency” (2004, p. 1) that marks the central node in any kind of cultural study, including on food. According to this dualism, where on the one hand “cultures are formed around the meaning people construct and share” (Lewis 1), meanings that are irrevocably shaped by power structures and social orders, on the other hand, it is these very power structures that make resistance and subversion possible. John Fiske in his essay “Cultural Studies and the Culture of Everyday Life” too reiterates the aforementioned impulse when he says, “The social order constrains and oppresses the people, but at the same time offers them resources to fight against those constraints” (1992, p. 157).

Food then, in the deliberations in this volume, is conceptualized as both constitutive of power structures and subjects in some articulations, and subversive of those very power structures and identity in some others. In order to provide a representative collection of essays on food and culture in/from India, we have undertaken a twofold approach in this volume. Firstly, several of the papers in this volume engage with local and topical issues around food and food culture in India to look at how it becomes a source of contestation, coercion, resistance, subversion and negotiation. In a culturally heterogeneous country such as India, tastes and taboos are plural and varied. An examination of the bearing of these diverse tastes and taboos on questions of identity, both individual and collective, is one of the central concerns of this collection of essays. A foray into what is deemed sacred food and what is believed to be polluted promises to bring to the fore the socio-cultural dimension of food. So does a discussion on fasting, fatness and episodes of collective consumption in India that this volume tries to showcase. Secondly, the volume situates many meanings of food and food culture in India by locating it in the matrix of dominant global food cultures that frame the debates in India. Tony Bennett’s essay “Texts, Readers, Reading Formations” is an important entry point into the second set of issues the volume wishes to engage with and provides some significant insights. Bennett critiques the idea rampant in critical analysis that a text is complete in itself and meaning is always already present in the text. He instead privileges the act of reading which takes “account of ‘the historical and social variability of the person of the reader’”. For Bennett, “meaning is a transitive phenomenon. It is not a *thing* that texts can *have*, but is something that can only be produced, and always differently, within the reading formations that regulate the encounters between texts and readers” (Bennet 1983, p. 8). The book acknowledges this very thesis by Bennett as the authors of the essays in this volume go on to study popular cultural global texts such as *Garfield* comics and *The Godfather* trilogy. An analysis of these texts included in this volume attests to the editors’ intention of investigating the reading formations of popular cultural global texts such as *Garfield* and *The Godfather* in the Indian context. The authors and their papers

collected in this volume thus undertake a “productive activation” or “continuous reproduction” of texts, be they literary, visual or cultural, to produce compelling conjectures on food cultures that have become part of everyday reality in India, especially in the wake of economic and cultural globalization. The reading formation or the overlapping relationship between production and reception makes any notion of a concluded text suspect, making reading formation around global cultures a crucial and necessitous terrain on which meaning is contested and negotiated. In Bennett’s articulation, the process of reading is primary and it needs to be contextualized and historicized. Thus, any study of food culture in India would be incomplete if it doesn’t account for the meanings that are produced in our post-colonial and globalized sociocultural Indian landscape today.

Where it is important to highlight what this book attempts to do, it is equally important to underscore what this book doesn’t pretend to do. The book doesn’t promise to provide a complete listing of thematic concerns on food. The book instead tries to provide a glimpse of food cultures in contemporary and India of yore, by blurring obsolete binaries between the local and the global especially in our current times. The papers in this volume are thus committed to looking at the pungent transactions between the local and the global, and the simultaneous cultivation of ideas, subjectivities and becomings that come into being because of that interaction. In a lot of ways, this intention then attracts attention to the planetary turn in humanities and social sciences.

Keeping the sentiment of approximating a sense of totality, clarity and thoroughness in mind, we have divided the book into four distinct sections. This fourfold division of the book seeks to foreground key areas that have animated discussions on crucial concerns while engaging in a cultural study of food. The book opens with a section on “Food Fads: Food and Public Culture down History” which looks at public culture and discourses around food through time and goes on in the second section to address the question of narratives and representation of food in literature in “Narrating Nourriture: Food in Literature”. The third section of the book titled “Visual Victuals: Food in Film, Animation and Comic Strips” engages with the many meanings that food produces chiefly in visual culture. Lastly, the fourth section titled “Of the Colonial and the Culinary: Food, the Folk and Registers of Resistance” engages with the diverse forms of resistance that food is able to mobilize.

Part I: Food Fads: Food and Public Culture

Food fads are produced, circulated and regulated because they are ultimately profitable. Ranging from the resonance of exotic virgin olive oil to the commonplace whole wheat brown bread, food fads are ubiquitous and dot our horizon today. Food festivals have become a recent fad, and they promise to evoke a community-oriented experience of consumption and ingestion. Food fads commonly last for a short period of time and are soon replaced by newer, more

persuasive fads. Microwave popcorns, for example, were a food fad which gained popularity with the technological shift towards microwaves in middle-class households. Microwaves in initial days were often accompanied with CDs and cookbooks that were meant to teach the buyer how to cook elaborate meals in a microwave. However, today microwaves are rarely used for purposes other than reheating (Allen and Albala 2007, p. 177).

Food fads related to health and nutrition have become a phenomenon of sorts in recent times. What is healthy and what is not has become an imperative question, and the entire food industry has off late geared around addressing this issue. Whether it is diet regimes endorsed by celebrities (from low carb to keto) or the mushrooming of gyms and health clubs across the country, ideas of calorie measurement and physical fitness have permeated the public culture and have gripped the national consciousness as it were. The paper titled “Food Substitutes, Health Supplements and the Geist of Fitness” by Anubhav Pradhan addresses this very issue in the paper and tries to uncloak it. He posits that the fitness industry first “fashions that which is desirable” and then produces means to satiate it, rendering any notion of enlightened and free choice of consumers “suspect”. He concludes by remarking how advertising of supplements and other products accentuates further consumption of these health and fitness fads in India.

The nexus of morality and health becomes an overarching question for Margaret Hass who opens an array of interesting questions concerning fast food, the criticism of which is invariably predicated in the moral panic over obesity. In her paper “Fast Food and Fatness in Popular Media: Interrogating the Link”, she debunks the idea of a naturalized causal relationship between fast food consumption and obesity to suggest that the fat body is not “inherently ‘unhealthy’”. She argues that the consumption of fast food doesn’t necessarily engender obesity but the reverberance of this idea in public consciousness attests to “cultural anxieties rather than actual concern for health”. If what food is consumed has such an enormous bearing on public discourse, where food is consumed and with whom becomes equally important to assess. Many such concerns are articulated in the representation of food in literature.

Part II: Narrating Nouriture: Food in Literature

The representation of food in literature provides a window into the complicated networks of affection and agitation related to food and its depiction. John Thieme and Ira Raja in their Introduction to *The Table is Laid: The Oxford Anthology of South Asian Food Writing* emphasize on “the communicative dimension of food and its importance as a signifying system” (2007, p. xvii). Their introductory essay comments on the frequency with which the subjects of spice, space, hunger, appetite, kitchen and restaurant appear in South Asian Food Writing. The editors contend that an “anti-essentialist attitude towards food discourses” promises to reveal how food functions as an “indicator”, “marker”, “bearer”, “trope”,

“reflection”, “signifier” of sociocultural meanings. For instance, in Bulbul Sharma’s short story titled “The Anger of Aubergines”, food is locked in a complex synesthetic relationship with feelings and perceptions. Food’s proximity to the body and its omnipresence in everyday life makes it an important marker of sociocultural identity. Often food is employed in/through literature to suggest and construct collective identities. For example, Aatreyee Ghosh in her paper “Accio FOOD!: Food and Its Magical Properties in Cartoons and Fantasy Literature” analyses fantasy literature such as the Harry Potter series, to propose how the world of food conjures a distinctly and exclusively British identity. Food in literature performs the function of a “silent chorus” and plays an active role in the production of meaning. She unravels how the material conditions of food production and circulation in the magical world are strongly linked to unequal class and ethnic relations. Her paper provides us an insight into the poetics and politics of food in literature. She highlights how the Potter series have spurred a new fandom in India around food.

Where food plays a significant role in identity formation in and through literature, it is also possible to imagine a politics of subversion through the register of food. What is prohibited and for whom and by whom? Where prohibition of certain foods can be symbolic of the prohibition of one’s identity, the injunction to consume can be equally autocratic. In fact, the command to consume and ingest can be a disciplinary mechanism to regulate and control individuals/communities. Anurima Chanda in her paper, “Who Eats Whom?: Transcending the Real Purpose Behind Food Events in Children’s Literature (If Any!) Through Nonsense Literature”, argues that food events in children’s fiction are often marked by repetitive injunction to eat right, act civil and observe table etiquettes, which are all reflective of the adult regimenting programmes to indoctrinate children into “the social mores of consumption”. This moral policing and social ordering around food is undercut by a parodied and trivial treatment of food in nonsense literature, written by both Lear and Carroll. She also discusses how the representation of food in select Indian English nonsense writing can be subversive and thus assertive. For instance, the use of local names to refer to indigenous foods facilitates the affirmation of one’s cultural identity. Similarly, the linguistic play that abounds in Indian English nonsense writing seeks to mock the authority of standard English: the colonizer’s language.

Subversion plays a key role in the representation of food in writings by women. Food is central to the appetitive and affective conditioning of women. At what point of time in the meal are women permitted to eat? Are the rules of eating different for married women and widowed women? A case in point is Githa Hariharan’s “The Remains of the Feast” which talks about a grandmother who has lived most part of her life as a widowed Brahmin woman. Although she is in the habit of consuming only home-made vegetarian food, as she nears her death, she develops a taste for “unexpected inappropriate” food (Hariharan 2004, p. 58). On her deathbed, she demands a “red sari”, “peanuts with chilli powder from the corner shop. Onion and Green chilli bondas deep fried in oil” (Hariharan 2004, p. 59). The story discusses the willing sensual realignment/attunement that taste accords. This realignment can best be described as a silent protest against the pedagogy of distaste that she has

been schooled into. Thus, Hariharan's story portrays a sensual realignment that mobilizes the grandmother to exercise a life of taste as she nears her death. As John Thieme and Ira Raja maintain, "Contemporary work in literary criticism and the social sciences has demonstrated the literal and symbolic importance of food in women's lives..." wherein eating and indulgence can become a form of resistance (Thieme and Raja 2007, p. xxxvi).

Sananda Roy in "What Do You Want for Dinner, Honey?: The Subversive Power of Food" focuses mainly on two short stories, namely "Chocolate" by Manju Kapur and "Lamb to the Slaughter" by Roald Dahl to reveal how spaces of cozy domesticity, connotative of female passivity, are revitalized by female protagonists to reject patriarchal norms and social codes. Tara and Mary are estranged wives who take recourse to food to exact revenge on their respective cheating husbands. Shruti Sareen in "Food, Love and the Self in Indian Women's Poetry in English" traces the transition that has occurred in the representation of "self" in relation to food, memory and spaces. She argues that in the poetry of later and contemporary poets such as Sumana Roy, Sujata Bhatt, Imtiaz Dharkar and Nabina Das one finds an unabashed engagement with the body, which is increasingly depicted in terms of food imagery, thus architecting an identity which is located in the overflow of the body instead of its exclusion. She conjectures that this change of representation occurs when women poets move from being depicted as food that is consumed by others to themselves consuming food and becoming active agents of consumption.

Sakshi Dogra, in "Food for Thought-Feeling: Studying Taste's Affective Function in Bulbul Sharma's *The Anger of Aubergines*", argues that food is locked in a complex synesthetic relationship with feelings and perception. She argues that food is not only symbolic in writing on food by women, but simultaneously also tasteful and material and, thus, sensual and affective. This affective function of food coupled with recipe sharing in Sharma's writing contributes to the production of a social context of feminine activity.

Part III: Visual Victuals: Food in Film, Animation and Comic Strips

The critically acclaimed movie *The Lunchbox*, written and directed by Ritesh Batra, narrates the story of a relationship that brews between Ila, a young housewife whose husband is having an affair, and Saajan, an old man on the brink of retirement. This unlikely association is established when a lunchbox that was meant for Ila's husband finds its way to Saajan's office. The following exchange of letters that this switching of lunchbox facilitates provides both Ila and Saajan with an opportunity to communicate and make meaning of their respective lives. The Lunchbox is thus portrayed as a vehicle through which communication is established.

The lunchbox is not just a prop or medium in the film but the very contents of this lunchbox acquire a language of their own. For example, when Ila is angry with

Saajan for having complained about the amount of salt in her food instead of praising her for her cooking skills, she deliberately sprinkles chillies in order to punish him. Similarly, when Saajan breaks his promise of meeting Ila, she sends an empty lunchbox next day to convey her displeasure. Commenting on the centrality of representation of food in movies, Anne Bower harks to Gaye Poole, who writes “it is possible to say things with food—resentment, love, compensation, anger, rebellion, withdrawal. This makes it a perfect conveyor of subtext; messages which are often implicit rather than explicit but surprisingly varied, strong, and sometimes violent or subversive” (2004, p. 3). The representation of food, as she rightly points out, contributes towards the production of meaning, making the presence of activities around food in a text, a connotative process (instead of food being seen as just a prop).

Arup K. Chatterjee in his paper “‘Luca Brasi Sleeps with the Fishes’: The Gastromythology of The Godfather Trilogy” reads in Francis Ford Coppola’s *The Godfather Trilogy* nuances of the Christian tradition of the Eucharist. He employs Abhinavagupta’s aesthetic concept of “rasadhvani” to do the same. He argues that liturgical symbolism flourishes in the movies and there is a gastromythology (or a representation of food rituals) at play. In *The Godfather* movies, this discourse of food rituals clubs “killing and culinary consumption” in a dialectical bind. Arup closes his paper by attributing Michael’s alienated status to the protagonist’s “inability to follow the mysterious gastromythology of the Corleones”. According to the author, it is not until we have unpacked the culinary symbolism latent in *The Godfather* trilogy that we can discern the movies in totality.

The question of consumption and symbolism of food also becomes a point of discussion for Deepti Razdan and Jyoti Arora, who in their paper “Chocolate and the Holly Factory: Analysing the ‘Role’ of Chocolate in Select Films from Hollywood” look at the variety of ways in which Hollywood movies represent chocolate. They maintain that the movies about chocolate serve as an advertisement for chocolates and help in their promotion. They look at some movies such as *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *Chocolate* and *Chocolate Wars* to suggest that the box office success of these movies depends on the way in which these movies go on to represent chocolate. They conclude by suggesting that the portrayal of chocolate in these movies fashions certain myths about chocolate and as a consequence the cultural significance that chocolate goes on to acquire helps create a demand for chocolates, not just as a commodity but also as a cultural signifier. They suggest that a similar trend can be seen in the myth-making around chocolate in India.

This symbolic valence of food is not just limited to movies but can be evidenced in other visual forms such as graphic novels, comic strips and animated sitcoms among others. Concerns of eating, ingestion and consumption are inseparably tied to the concern for appetite and a desire to satisfy bodily needs. However, appetite is not merely restricted to a yearning for food, but is available as a category for multiple kinds of metaphorical and symbolic purposes and needs. It is this figurative and consequently extended meaning of appetite that the paper titled “The Anatomy of Obesity: Cartman and the Economy of Consumption in South Park” by

Ishaan Mital and Safwan Amir explore. The authors retell the story of Eric Cartman, from the hit American animated sitcom *South Park*, as a story of a child's attempt to gain agency and authority. The authors open their argument by situating obesity as an excess to appetite where appetite connotes a desire for not just for food but also for material objects and power. The authors undertake a comparative analysis of consumption in USA and India. For instance, they argue that where the discourse of obesity is spun to marginalize the illegal migrant's body in USA, in India it's the Brahmin who is conceived of as obese. They employ caste as an analytical tool and imagine a local version of South Park to understand the power dynamics that are inherent in consumption of foods.

The connotative and signifying system of food in visual culture finds depiction in Shaheen Saba's essay titled "Eat, Sleep and Dream Trilogy in *Garfield* and *Calvin and Hobbes*" (comic strips) who juxtaposes the food habits of Calvin and Garfield (eponymous) to elucidate the contrary messages underlined by the two comic strips. She argues that where Garfield is portrayed as an obese lazy cat who loves to devour lasagne, Calvin's overt dislike for food stands in direct contrast to the former. She dwells on how these depictions can impact readers, especially children, who are avid consumers of comic strips everywhere, as also in India. Connecting television viewing to daydreaming in the two comic strips, Shaheen elaborates on various sequences in the comic strips where food and daydreaming contribute to how meaning is produced by the reader/spectator.

Part IV: Of the Colonial and the Culinary: Food, the Folk and Registers of Resistance

As the title of this section suggests, the essays collected in this section initiate a discussion on the various modes and manners of resistance which are articulated in/by/through food. This section is devoted to suggesting how resistance can be couched in the ingestion or rejection of food. The slow food movement is an example of resistance that has been mounted to challenge acceptable norms of eating. The papers in this section attract attention to how food acts as an agent of political and cultural resistance against the dominant social order. Where sometimes this resistance takes the form of a demand for better access to food, at other times it is conveyed by refusing to consume food and go on as fast as in the case of Irom Sharmila. At yet other times, the preparation and consumption of food fosters cultural memory and effect resistance.

For instance, Róbert Balogh in "Feeding Workers in Colonial India 1919–1947" argues that the discourse concerning the relationship between nutrition and work in Colonial India was marked by heterogeneous conceptualization. So, initially where there was discrimination in the dietary requirements of British troops as opposed to Indian troops, gradually in the 1930s there was a change in British governmentality with an emphasis on citizenship and trusteeship and a simultaneous demand was

made for “increased nutrition levels” for the Indians. The first part of his essay argues that the rationale of nutrition science, scientific management and welfare programmes and social services were brought in to ostensibly address the needs of industrial labour in India. Balogh also elaborates how this discourse on nutrition often marginalized women as workers in the labour force. Women’s dietary needs were considered far less than men. Another section of people who could not lay any claim to class or nation was “coolies”. It was the “coolies” against whom a “re-construction of racial and national boundaries and hierarchies in the age of emancipation” could take place. In the closing part of the essay, Robert shows how industrial labour gradually “internalized” the rationale of “scientific management” to ask for better access to food.

Where the discourse of nutrition science became central to industrial labour and provided a language for articulation of resistance as shown above, folk practices surrounding food are fundamental for the constitution of community identity per se. In “Of Khaar, Pithaa and Aitaa’r Posola: Exploring the Folk Aesthetics and the Erotic in Assamese Food”, Prerana Choudhury and Rini Barman comment on the use of food, both edible and inedible, in Assamese poetry, festivals and folk songs. They examine the centrality of food at the festival of Magh Bihu, on the occasion of Uruka, in the poetry of Nitoo Das and Uddipana Goswami, to argue that food is not just about “taste” and its pleasures but it also provides an entire range of “tactile” and “olfactory” experience which needs to be focused upon as well. The authors go on to suggest that where sometimes food engenders cultural memory at other times it carries nuances of sexual expressiveness, both of which have immense bearing on formation of identities, especially Assamese identity. They conclude by critiquing the derogatory attitude that north-east invites from others for its folk practices (in this particular case those associated with food) which are an inherent part of Assamese identity and which remain un-understood by others.

Where folk practices which involve consumption of food are an act of assertion of one’s identity, the very act of refusing to ingest food is also an act of asserting one’s self-hood and a means to resist the dominant social order. Fasting has been and continues to be a powerful articulation of non-violent resistance. “Hunger Games: Politics of the Ema Market, the Kitchen and Protest in Manipur” by Samurailatpam Tarun Sharma and Sumitra Thoidingjam highlights the 10 years-long fast by Irom Sharmila as part of her protest against the state. The authors begin by contrasting the relationship between women and food in the public sphere and the private sphere and argue that where Ema Market in Manipur becomes a space of economic independence, political activism, everyday interaction and formation of collective identities for women, the domestic set-up poses several challenges for these very women. In the private sphere of the kitchen, often women find themselves tied to regressive and archaic notions of purity and other moral codes.

Notions of purity are central to the question of race, caste and food. Ved Prakash opens his argument by highlighting how in any Indian household, the space of the kitchen is dedicated to segregating food which is considered pure, from food (usually meat) that is considered “abhorrent”. His paper “Food for Soul, ‘Soul’ for

Food: The Tale of Blacks Told Through Soul Food” extends this argument concerning permissible and impermissible food to trace the trajectory of “soul food” from its origin to it being sold in restaurants. He argues that the genesis of soul food lies in the days of slavery when African Americans were given “throwaways of whites” which were used by the slaves to prepare their meals. It was during the Black Power Movement of the 1960s that the term soul gained currency for defining black culture. The author makes an important differentiation between soul food and southern food, conceptualizing the latter as “food of survival”. Ved Prakash ends his paper by stating that soul food is an integral part of the African American consciousness and a source of pride for the community. Thus, a meal prepared out of discarded food in this case can be seen as a political and cultural form of resistance by the community, much like quilt-making by black women, who took discarded cloth and sewed them into artistic and creative quilts.

The volume seeks to be a timely intervention in the interdisciplinary study of food and culture it generates. These essays on food culture studies engage chiefly with tropes which have been pertinent to examine the intersection of food studies with culture studies. Firstly, papers in this volume engage with questions of consumption, representation and mediation of food. The essays look at consumption practices in public culture and ethnic culture. These range from collective consumption of tabooed food at food festivals to an exploration of spaces such as Ema Market as symptomatic of liberty and autonomy. There is also a significant engagement with representation of ingestion and appetite in literary and visual culture. Food functions not merely as a prop, an accessory which is trivial or secondary to the meaning-making exercise in these depictions. Instead, as these diverse papers elucidate, “notions of historicity, locality, or authenticity *rest* in food” (Ray and Srinivas 2012, p. 6). To continue, the papers in this volume demonstrate that food can be understood in its representational form, as a system of communication, which creates meanings for its consumers. Food can be read as carrying the sensual, the non-representational and non-conceptual content of taste and other senses along with it. As cultural practice that is closely tied to the body, food has the potential to mobilize and catalyse masses.

Secondly, keeping in mind the cross-disciplinary nature of the field and the methodological approaches employed here derive from both social sciences and humanities, these papers together can then be most appropriately studied within the rubric of cultural studies. Keeping with the dualism that forms the core of food culture studies, the papers look at food as an important tool of mediation between power structures and human agency. As suggested and articulated in the papers collected here, food cultures participate in a complicated relationship between power structures and human agency. Food is often co-opted and mediated by social structures to garner consent and establish hegemony and various discourses around food come to constitute various subject positions related to food. Where on the one hand food constitutes subjects, it also creates occasions for these subjects to

articulate their resistance through food. Food thus offers a potential of subversion, and this has implication for questions concerning identity, both individual and collective.

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