The Department of
Sociology and Anthropology

EIDOS
2018-19

Freshly brewed thoughts on FOOD

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Journal of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology
St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Mumbai

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Food

JOURNAL TEAM

Editorial Team (From left to right): Smriti Natarajan, Vaishnavi Sinha, Bhuvan Majmudar, Madhura Muralidharan (Editor-in-Chief), Ms. Ankita Gujar (Staff Co-ordinator), Yashvi Gada, Shruti Krishnan

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EDITORIAL

Eidos /ˈʌɪdɒs/
The distinctive expression of the cognitive or intellectual character of a culture or social group

True to its etymological roots, this journal has always endeavoured to be a creative space for students to articulate their ideas while engaging with the disciplines of sociology and anthropology. When the editorial team this year met to brainstorm for a theme, we wanted to choose something that was accessible to everyone; something so simple that anyone could relate to it irrespective of their identity. We quickly reached a consensus that set us on a path exploring a theme close to many hearts; we bring to you the theme for 2018-19: 'Food'.

As aptly worded by renowned journalist Vikram Doctor, "*everybody has to eat. Everybody has some sort of history and memory of eating. So food becomes a way to understand an individual, to understand communities, and at a larger level - it becomes a way to understand society*". As a student of sociology and anthropology myself, I was determined to not limit this enterprise of "understanding society" to just those who formally study these disciplines. With my editorial team sharing the same vision for Eidos, we put together a team of student writers this year who span across various disciplines; a venture that successfully created a rich body of works that examine food from an interdisciplinary perspective. We further had a peer discussion session so that editors and writers could freely interact to contribute to each other's ideas, making this issue a true product of collective efforts. This year, we have brought back the tradition of inviting professionals in the field to be a part of the Eidos experience. We are fortunate to have two very distinguished personalities, Mr. Raamesh Gowri Raghavan and Mr. Vikram Doctor, contribute to this issue. In the quest to go beyond the written word, this issue is interspersed with photographs taken by students who aimed to illustrate complex ideas running through the articles through visual stimuli. We hope that there's a little for everyone to savour when they read this issue.

I would encourage every reader to approach it just as they would approach eating food; in their own style. Savour the impactful photographs with your eye, let your mind conjure up smells and sights as you glance through the abstracts deciding what to read and let your brain hold on to the taste of the articles long after you have put the issue down – inspiring you to appreciate, analyse and critique what you consumed. Last but not the least, the chefs would love to know what you thought of their work; so please feel free to write to us at journal.eidos@gmail.com with any comments or suggestions that you might have for our team. Here's wishing you an eventful journey through this issue. Bon appetit!

Madhura Muralidharan
Editor-in-Chief (Eidos 2018-19)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This issue is a true product of collective efforts. First and foremost, it would have been impossible to put together such an interesting variety of nuanced articles without the enthusiastic determination that every student author and editor put into their research article. That said, the journal would not have come to life without the contributions made by the creatives team, who tirelessly persisted in their quest to capture the intricacies of food through photographs and paintings.

We would like to thank all the professors of our department – Dr. Sam Taraporevala, Dr. Pranoti Chirmuley, Ms. Radhika Rani, Ms. Ankita Gujar and Dr. (Fr.) Savio Abreu – for putting in countless hours guiding the authors and the editorial team through this endeavour. This journal would not have been possible without our faculty co-ordinator Ms. Ankita Gujar, who supported and encouraged the student editorial team throughout this process. In addition to this, we are grateful to the students and staff who helped us incorporate two very interesting papers from this year's annual seminar (themed Going Boink: Reality 2.0) into this issue.

We would like to extend a heartfelt appreciation to our guest contributors, who made this issue even more special by bringing in their professional experience for students to learn from: Mr. Raamesh Gowri Raghavan (Course Coordinator and Principal Faculty at the Centre for Extramural Studies, University of Mumbai) – who is well-known for his work in the field of historical anthropology – for contributing an article titled 'Coffee and its Two Colonisations', and renowned journalist Mr. Vikram Doctor – creator of the first ever food podcast in India – for agreeing to be interviewed and for sharing his personal and professional journey with food.

Last but not the least, we would like to express our gratitude towards our peers at the Academy of Sociology and Anthropology for being extremely supportive and pitching in whenever help was required in any form, as well as to the multiple supporters who proofread the manuscript to make sure no detail was left unchecked. We hope that the readers enjoy reading this issue of Eidos and take something away it; be it thoughts, ideas or even just a sense of having read something stimulating.

THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY: ANNUAL REPORT

(From left to right): Ms. Radhika Rani, Dr. Sam Taraporevala, Ms. Ankita Gujar, Dr. Pranoti Chirmuley

The Department of Sociology and Anthropology had an eventful year that included a change in its staff members. As Dr. Pranoti Chirmuley was on maternity leave in the Odd semester, we were joined by Dr. Sunetro Ghosal. We also extended a warm welcome to Dr. (Fr.) Savio Abreu who has joined as faculty member from this academic year. The Department along with its constituent student bodies - the Academy of Sociology and Anthropology and the Eidos Editorial Team - has had a memorable academic year (2018-19). We detail some of the highlights here:

The Mentor-Mentee Program:

In its third run, the Mentor-Mentee program connects students of Sociology and Anthropology from the First and Second Year with their Third Year counterparts. Students are paired with seniors who guide them throughout the year with assignments, readings and finding a balance between the various activities that college has to offer.

Honours Program

An honours seminar in "Engaged Ethnography and Public Anthropology: Genealogy, Critique, Practice" was conducted by Mr. Proshant Chakraborty in July-August 2018. This seminar covered a brief history of applying anthropology to 'real-world' problems, both historical and contemporary, from colonialism, to multiculturalism and cultural relativism, to problems posed by neoliberal capitalism, social and political violence, and climate change. Particular emphasis was given on the development of 'public' and 'engaged' forms of anthropology which questioned the supposed neutrality or objectivity of science.

Writing Workshop

The Academy of Sociology and Anthropology organised a writing workshop for students which was conducted by Dr. Sunetro Ghosal and Ms. Ankita Gujar, along with the Eidos Editorial Team. They covered the various aspects of writing academic assignments as along with the basics of citing, referencing and plagiarism.

Writing Workshop 2.0

On popular demand, the Academy of Sociology and Anthropology organised a second round of the writing workshop which was conducted by Dr. Sunetro Ghosal. This series was tailored to the needs of students across their undergraduate years and focused on addressing a variety of writing problems faced by them.

Department-centric SIP

The Department-centric SIP for this academic year involved knowing and understanding the environment and rights, and community outreach through environmental education. It was conducted across 2 days in 3 phases by resource person Snowy Baptista, who works with Mumbaikars for Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP), and Ms. Ankita Gujar. The students were familiarized with information, debates and general issues surrounding the city, its connection with SGNP and what role they can play in outreach. Nine students created activities around storytelling, games, charts and quizzes to use during a 1.5-hour workshop for 30 students of the 3rd and 5th standard of a government school situated in the national park.

Marathi Play

The Department hosted a Marathi play - 'Family.com'- which was conceptualised and executed entirely by a group of students. The play served as a helpful introduction to its annual seminar as it explored the nuances of technological development and its interaction with interpersonal relations in the actual and virtual worlds. It also attempted to access the language of technology through a regional language.

Annual Department Seminar

The annual seminar was organised by the Department of Sociology and Anthropology and The Academy of Sociology and Anthropology on the 18th and 19th of January, 2019, at Premanjali Counselling Services, Nalla Sopara. Students across different academic years and various disciplines connected over this year's theme - "Going Boink! Reality 2.0" through paper presentations and intensive panel discussions.

Documentary Screening:

The Academy of Sociology and Anthropology organised a special screening of 'But What Was She Wearing' on 4th February 2019. This feature-length documentary on sexual harassment at the workplace examines the significance of the prevailing law and the impossible odds Indian women are up against in pursuit of justice. The screening was followed by an interactive session with its director Vaishnavi Sundar.

Blog: Deconstructing Realities

The official blog of the Department is run by a team of students who work on making the thoughts, ideas and words of Xavierites and alumni accessible to a larger audience. The blog aims to be a forum to share sociological thought on contemporary issues while promoting an atmosphere that fosters academic research. The recent posts have been about new food movements, value of vowels and deconstructing porn in popular culture, among other topics.

Staff Activities through the Year

Dr. Sam Taraporevala undertook a sensitization workshop and accessible technology demonstration for the DOW Chemicals at their Vikhroli office in order to promote the concept of inclusion in the workplace. He conducted "*I For Inclusion*" sensitization training at Dhirubhai Ambani International School for teachers to facilitate effective teaching, learning and evaluation of the visually challenged students in inclusive classrooms. He delivered the keynote speech on "*Explore, Experience and Empower*" as part of the Round Square International Conference at the same location. He also held a sensitization workshop and accessible technology demonstration at IIT Gandhinagar organised for educators at the school, college and university levels.

He was invited to speak at Snehankit as a chief guest at their annual day and was a panellist and speaker at the National Conference on Social Integration "*Know your Rights*" by Saksham and Camba in Jaipur at Keshav Vidyapeeth. He was appointed as a member of the committee to draft an ordinance of Maharashtra government to conduct access audits and a celebrate world disability day, set up by Kavayitri Bahinabai Chaudhari of North Maharashtra University, Jalgaon. He also organized and coordinated access technology exhibitions at Standard Chartered bank at BKC, India Economist Summit in Trident, Reliance Jio office at Reliance Corporate Park in Ghansoli and at Accenture's office in Vikhroli, with an aim to spread awareness on how access to technology can help build a more inclusive society.

Dr. Pranoti Chirmuley completed her research titled '*Invisible faiths and marginalized identities: Conservation of the cultural transformation of the Parsi Zoroastrian Identity (Kanpur & Bombay)* and submitted it to the Heras Institute for the Post-Doctoral Heras Tata Heritage Conservation Fellowship.

Ms. Radhika Rani conducted a series of interactive sessions on "*Career Opportunities in the Humanities*" with students of secondary and higher secondary at Shri Guru Nanak School in Damoh (MP).

Ms. Ankita Gujar conducted the Privilege Walk organised by the Social Service League (SSL). She co-conducted a Writing Workshop along with Dr. Sunetro Ghosal, to help students with academic writing skills. She was the Rapporteur for Conference on "*Young Urban Women and Safe Cities"* organised by the Maharashtra State Women's Commission and ActionAid India. She also organised the department-centric SIP to facilitate exchange between students of the college and local school students from Sanjay Gandhi National Park.

Dr. (Fr.) Savio Abreu published a paper titled "*Reflections from New Religious Movements on Ecology*" in the Satya Nilayam Chennai Journal of Intercultural Philosophy. He also wrote a review of the book '*Pentecostals, Proselytization and Anti-Christian Violence in Contemporary India*' by Chad Bauman, which was published in PentecoStudies. He presented a paper titled: *The Challenge of Stringent, Radical Nationalism to Inclusive Development*" at the "Inclusive Development Workshop: Greater China and Beyond" organised by Centre for Greater China Studies, Hang Seng Management College, Hong Kong. He conducted a 2-credit course on "*The History of the Suppression and Restoration of the Society of Jesus*" for Jesuit Novices at XTC, Desur, Belgaum.

We are grateful to everyone who has been instrumental in initiating and supporting our various activities. The Department strives to provide a variety of enriching experiences for the students and we look forward to carrying this legacy ahead.

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IN CONVERSATION WITH VIKRAM DOCTOR

Based on a telephonic interview with the Editor-in-Chief

Let's begin with your journey in this area. How did your career in food begin?

When I started as a professional journalist, I was working for the magazine 'Business India'. When I started doing restaurant reviews, I quickly got bored for a number of reasons. One is, when I started about 24 years ago, the restaurant scene was quite limited in Bombay. Since the real estate costs and the overheads of running a restaurant are so high, it's very difficult trying to find interesting, niche restaurants. What tends to happen is, just because of the sheer need of profitability, restaurants end up being pretty much the same. Things are slightly different now, real estate has opened up in the mill areas and suburbs, but the overheads of running a restaurant in Bombay are still very high. With time, I understood that food is a fascinating way to understand people. It's a facet of your life like sex or religion. Everybody has to eat. Everybody has some sort of history and memory of eating. Everybody's family has certain ways of cooking. So food becomes a way to understand an individual, to understand communities and at a larger level, it becomes a way to understand society. I am also a business journalist - it helped me understand the economics of food, the policy issues involved with food. Like all journalists, I write about India, Indian society and how it changes…I just happen to do it through food.

At what part of your journey did you choose to start the Real Food Podcast?

The Food Podcast happened about 4 or 5 years back, simply because I had a friend who was into radio and podcasts and he wanted to start doing audio podcasts in India because podcasts had taken off in the West and there was an audience for them there. Right from the start, he asked me to do a podcast on Indian food. And I thought this was a fascinating way to write about what I was writing about anyway but in a different medium.

You also do write for the Economic Times. The Food Podcast, then, becomes a different medium to talk about food. Are there different ways in which you approach food depending on the media platform that you're on?

Actually much less than I thought because the medium might be different, but what was constant to both print and audio was that you were telling a story. In many ways, I found that doing the podcast made me go back to print journalism. In a podcast, it was even more important than in print journalism to tell a story because the technical issue with a podcast is that people are generally listening while they're commuting, exercising or cooking. The good side of that is that it's non-intrusive and people do these other things while listening to podcasts; so we could multi-task. But it also means that it is easy to lose concentration. To make people continue listening, you need to have a very strong story. And typically, this is not the only way to do podcasts, but the podcasts I found interesting and I ended up doing were the kind of podcasts with a strong story. I would say actually writing for the podcast helped my print journalism.

In general when you approach writing about food or even speaking about it, what do you think about? What makes you choose what you write about?
It can be completely random. It's often based on food issues in the general media in the world at large. For instance, if there are onion prices rising or if tomato prices are falling…but quite often I also get the idea for stories by just walking around, looking at food fairs, the new food ideas that are coming out. You know, just last week I was driving from Goa to Mumbai, I suddenly started noticing that a lot of *dhaabas* along the Pune to Kolhapur national highway, serve this *chai* called *tandoori chai*. I'd never seen it in Bombay; it's something that started in Pune and it actually seems to be spreading along the highways. Even in Bombay, there are some places that serve tandoori chai but it's all in New Bombay, on the margins of the city. I'm sure somebody will start doing it in Bombay too. Here there's something new with something as basic as chai. I mean, as far as I understand the process, it's just a way of adding a slightly smoky taste to the ordinary milk chai. So, there's more presentation, a little bit of drama in it. But, it's also interesting that it's spreading around the roadside because it shows how *dhaabas* are strong means for food trends to travel. This is something happening at a very grassroots level. You know, I've never seen a mainstream survey on tandoori chai and this how I'm saying that you get stories, you have to keep looking.

To give you another example, this thing called Chinese *bhel*. It's something that I've never seen anyone writing about in the mainstream press. It's something that came up again at a very grassroots level. I mean, what is Chinese *bhel*? It's cabbage which is lightly tossed with some schezuan sauce, and then they put some *bhel* on top. I mean, if you look at it, it's a very basic kind of a warm Indian salad. Everybody wants something new, slightly healthier. I mean, this is not exactly healthy but on a spectrum of fried noodles onwards, Chinese *bhel* is marginally healthier. It's also fascinating since it's a way of cooking cabbage. Cabbage is a vegetable that nobody ever writes about, but, it's one of the basic vegetables out there. It's a vegetable that I think, Indians cook very well even though we don't really care very much about it. I've never seen cabbage on a restaurant menu. It's a very *ghar ka* sort of *sabzi*. Yet, it's a very important vegetable. Across the world, cabbage is a vegetable of the poor people because it's a vegetable that grows easily, that stays good for a long time and actually has a lot of nutrients. But across the world it always has the reputation of being the food of the poor. In India, cabbage was seen as an English vegetable, from the 19th century, brought by the British. Even though it's a slightly more western vegetable, it's the poor people who are innovating with cabbage and that to me is very interesting.

Schezuan is interesting in itself. What is schezuan sauce? It's a made-up spicy concoction of chillies, vinegar and garlic, which has been given the name "schezuan" when it has actually got nothing to do with schezuan. If it was actually schezuan, you'd have Schezuan peppers in it. This shows how food cultures interact with other. Schezuan food comes to India, the name at least, at a very high-end level; when the Taj group opens a Golden Dragon and decides to get all sorts of food because they realised that the Chinese food that we eat made by the Chinese who were in India, like the Cantonese, was too bland. So, they brought schezuan in India and of course over time a few places like China Garden became more Indianized, but it was still at the high-end level. But the schezuan name was there. And then at some time, maybe it was chefs, cooks, waiters who had worked in these places, who took the name or just the idea and came up with a very spicy sauce. It's a commercialised sauce because it uses vinegar and things like that. And suddenly, schezuan is there in small towns in India and people are adding it to Chinese *bhel*. I mean, to me this is fascinating how different cultures, interact with each other and create things.

Speaking of creating new things out of two seemingly different cultures - in your recent podcast titled "Is Chicken just Non-Veg Paneer?", you spoke about how Indians don't really appreciate the authentic flavour of chicken which tends to be bland. How does the "authenticity" of a certain ingredient play into cultural adaptations of its usage?

Authenticity is a really loaded term, I mean what really is authentic? And why do people use that term? I am less interested in authenticity as compared to why people need to claim that things are authentic. Yes, of course, there are certain foods that are historically or geographically "authentic" in a sense. But in every other way, the history of food shows so many pattern changes, interchanges, borrowings, lendings etc. In feeling the need for authenticity, it seems to me people seem to need to have food to define their identity; a personal's individual journey or that of a community. Otherwise, our histories are so complicated and mixed up that it's sort of useless to talk about authenticity.

Apart from food defining individual identity, I remember watching this video of yours on YouTube wherein you were speaking about the decriminalisation of the LGBTQI+ community through Section 377. You mentioned that food, and the LGBT sandwich in particular, would help normalise a larger collective identity?

Well, a friend of mine was working for one of these large chains and was in charge of the menu. He created the LGBT sandwich. I don't seriously think that a sandwich is going to make a big difference to gay people in India. But to me, it's interesting that 20-30 years ago, almost nobody spoke about gays and lesbians. The fact that somebody was using the term 'LGBT' was at least bringing the words out there to the public and the more people use that, the better. It's said that one of the biggest reasons for homophobia or any kind of distrust is just not knowing the other. A large goal of the LGBT community has been normalisation, so something as silly as an LGBT sandwich is part of it. Across Bombay and in general, people communicate through food and build trust through it. We've seen this typically in large apartment blocks of Bombay which, in the past, used to be quite diverse and during festivals, families would exchange foods. But yes, you would share food that was appropriate, so like, a Muslim family wouldn't send *biryani* to a vegetarian Hindu house, but they might send *sevaiyaan*.

One of the worst things that has happened in Mumbai is this sort of policy where it's been acceptable for people to exclude other communities from buildings and that sort of thing means everyone's reached into their bubble and once you're in a bubble, you don't communicate with other families. It's very easy, in fact, exchange of foods you know. For instance, kids would go between houses- you would go to a Christian house to eat or a Muslim house to eat, again, I mean, there was mutual respect. My boyfriend was telling me about how when he grew up in Kandivali, he was best friends with this Muslim kid. My boyfriend is Hindu from a vegetarian family and because he and this Muslim boy were good friends, their mothers became friendly. My boyfriend's mother taught his friend's mother how to cook *rajma* and she taught him. The Muslim boy's mother taught my boyfriend's mother how to cook *sevaiyaan*. That exchange was very typical in mixed buildings, it still is. I mean, there are still mixed buildings and we still see exchanges happening and it's very important that this sort of food exchange happens because you know, food is one way to bridge differences.

But I was wondering when food is used as part of a larger socio-political movement, is there also, would you say, a risk of it being commercialised within larger capitalist agenda?
I mean that is both good and bad you know, commercialisation at least means that it becomes more available. So, I mean, commercialised is not necessarily a bad thing. For instance, the *vada pav* came together in the '50s or '60s from multiple origins. It became a cheap sort of snack in *maidaans*. Shivaji Park, for instance, often claimed to be one place where *vada pav* became popular and Shivaji Park is an interesting location. That whole area also is the heartland of what would become the Shiv Sena. At some point, the Sena seemed to have taken this idea of *vada pav* as a useful way to give employment to the young guys who would come out and agitate on the streets. They needed these guys to have some sort of employment on a regular basis but they also needed them to be easily available for whatever political agitation.

I mean, after a point, the people who make the *pav* are now almost all North Indian workers who Shiv Sena has been fighting against. Other people started appropriating vada pav; I think it was the Dalit movement who started saying we want to have a Bhim vada pav because they were claiming vada pav from a Dalit perspective. At the same time you have people like Jumbo King, which again tries to create a commercialised form of *vada pav* using that very Maharashtrian symbol of the guy with the moustache and a Gandhi *topi*. So, you know, this is how vada pav has evolved within the city, responding to the different socio-political movements in the city, but also not entirely controlled by them because vada pav has an identity in itself.

That's extremely interesting, and the thing is, a lot of what you're saying is knowledge that we haven't been exposed to as students within an academic sphere. So, if you had some advice to give to students approaching deconstructing food in any manner, would you have any particular techniques you would suggest?
I think people should try and maybe investigate the history; just go out and speak to people, you know, speak to the people who actually make food. One of the things that is really interesting about food is that everybody eats food. And a huge amount of people are involved in producing food. Typically, the people who are involved in producing food

are the sort of people who generally don’t get spoken to. They are often illiterate, they are often uneducated, and their work is often overlooked. I mean, food in India depends upon this vast amount of unappreciated women, and the servants and cooks really produce food.

Lastly, what are your views on the need to explore food in the academics sphere?
Oh it's absolutely important to write about food in academic spheres. It’s happening to some extent abroad, but I just feel that there are problems where it can become too academic. This is why I think blogging is really important because blogging is a way to make things accessible. Academic reports are often within academic publications for which you need a library. Also, actually there is a lot of academic writing on food. It’s just that people often don’t realise the sphere it’s happening in. Many historians talk about it, people who talk about it in terms of community, in terms of geography. It need not actually be talked about as food or in terms of cooking. But there are instances like the Indian Council for Agricultural Research where there are different institutes for every possible kind of food that we eat in India and each institute has a whole cadre of scientists who are all working on research papers. Most of it is very technical, botanic or animal husbandry related - it’s not of wider interest. But the thing is they are chronicling a lot of information about food and it is there! Because they are seen as agricultural scientists, nobody from an ethnographic sphere usually goes to talk to them. But they have a great deal of knowledge about actual food, the practices, how they cultivate it and how they are used. So there is a vast body of food related research that is happening in India but it’s not really being pulled together. You have to go in and search for the details and speak to them. We need to communicate across disciplines and we need to make things accessible.

COFFEE AND ITS TWO COLONISATIONS

Authored by: Raamesh Gowri Raghavan
Edited by: Madhura Muralidharan

Coffee: The first colonisation of the land

The founding myth of coffee growing in India holds that in the 17th century, the Sufi mystic Hazrat Shah-Janab Alla Magatabi (popularly known as Baba Budan) established the first coffee plantations in India in the hills now known as Bababudanagiri in Chikkamagaluru district of Karnataka, after smuggling out seven unroasted coffee beans tied to his belly (at great risk to his life) from Mocha, Yemen (Sridhar, 2008). Dates are uncertain as is the historicity of this claim: the website of the Coffee Board of India picks a date of 1600 CE ("The Coffee Board, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India", 2014) while the website of the Collectorate of Chikkamagaluru says 1670 ("History of Chikkamagaluru", n.d.).

Nevertheless, the fact remains that Europeans did find *Coffea arabica* growing in India. The first European reference to coffee in the Indian peninsula comes from 1723 (Mohandas, 2014). The complaint of the taste not being "refined" stems from the fact that Indian coffee was shipped to Arabia and remarketed as Mocha to the Europeans (Sridhar, 2008). The second report comes from one Francis Buchanan from Kerala that one box was the total export of coffee from Kannur in 1799 and 6 chests and 6 mounds in 1800 (Mohandas, 2014). Before the 1830s, coffee was cultivated mostly in Mudigere, Koppa, Manjarabad, Sakaleshpur and Kadur in the much-reduced Mysore state (newly restored to the Wodeyars) (Sridhar, 2008) and in Anjarakkandy in Wayanad district of Kerala (Mohandas, 2014) as a *hittalu* (backyard) crop by the peasantry.

Maharaja Krishna Raja Wodeyar III (reigned 1799-1868) and his Dewan Krishnacharya Purnaiah tried to change this into an 'estate' based economic model, so they traded land for a share of the coffee produced (*batayi*), but unable to collect the revenues so due, handed over coffee collection rights to Parry & Company (now Eid-Parry) from 1823 to 1833. After Parry's rights were abolished in 1834, coffee cultivation was opened to capital, and the government imposed a duty of Rs. 4 per *maund* (Sridhar, 2008). Thomas Cannon's Mylemoney Estate became the first among 662 estates in Mysore and Malabar.

Coffee cultivation on a commercial scale in Wayanad was begun by an East India Company armyman, Capt. Bevan at Mananthavady. By 1890-91, 662 'European' monoculture plantations grew coffee (mostly *Coffea robusta*) on 49,862 acres mostly in Southern Coorg and Wayanad, while 27,180 'Indian' mixed-culture home farms spread over 96,814 acres would set aside a small part of their output for coffee (*Coffea arabica*) in the Chikkamagaluru, Manjarabad, North Coorg and Biligirirangan hills (Sridhar, 2008). Practically every gram of coffee was exported, as the Indian appetite was near-zero.

A major outbreak of white stem borer, green bug and leaf rust in the 1860s devastated the coffee crop in both South India and Ceylon (Sridhar, 2008). While the latter switched to tea, the European planters in India took to growing the hardier *Coffea robusta*, from the Dutch plantations of the East Indies. *Coffea arabica* yields a finer-tasting brew (the mainstay of 'filter' coffees), but is finickier to grow. *Coffea robusta* lives up to its name: not just a robust grower, but also a robust brew ("Coffee Regions – India", 2014). Labour conditions on the European plantations were based on laws like the Workmen's Breach of Contract Act of 1859 and the Coffee-Stealing Prevention Act of 1878, which ensured that any rights workers held, were mostly in the breach (Mohandas, 2014). For example, conditions of pay were poor: in the Mysore plantations, men were paid two annas; women an anna and four paise a month and in Wayanad payment was in kind—three *edangazhi* (~800g) of rice per man and two per woman. Workers and *maistries* (foremen) could be fined or jailed if found possessing freshly picked coffee.

Coffee: The first colonisation of the mind

When Indians took to drinking coffee – we have not been able to establish on a firm footing. In Arab style, it would have been lightly roasted with cardamoms ("Gulf Arabic Coffee – Qahwa Arabiyyah", n.d.), but we have found no references to such consumption in India. The first concrete reference comes from 1906, in the Tanjore District Gazetteer:

> The old practice of taking kanji, or cold rice-water, in the early morning is rapidly giving way to coffee drinking, a degenerate innovation at which the older generation shake their heads. Even Pallans [a Dalit caste] in some parts insist on having their cup of coffee before the go out to work; with the younger members of the richer classes the custom of drinking coffee is almost general.

Contemporaneous accounts lament the decline of cultural standards as the consumption of coffee increased; and conservatives and Gandhians tried to have it branded on the same lines as beer and arrack (Vēṅkaṭācalapati, 2006). It inserted itself into the caste divide: segregated coffee houses grated in the eyes of the other castes (as they should any sane person) leading to lawsuits, and were the target of municipal anti-discrimination regulations (TNN, 2014), and a Periyar polemic:

> Think a little of how the Tamilian's shame is today. In the coffee clubs he is segregated as a low caste. If we go around this village, several boards say, 'This is for Brahmins', 'This is for Sudras', 'Panchamas, Muslims and Christians will not be given food, snacks or water here'…are placed in every coffee shop that the Brahmins own, in every hall, in every tank and temple, rules are created, and people are divided; aversion and dislike are created; disgrace is created. Let any Congress leader get up and say, let them accept that at least as far as this place is concerned in the coffee shops and Brahmin hotels, the boards that say 'Brahmins – Non-Brahmins' will be removed and flung off (Srinivasa, 2015).

Nevertheless, by the late 1930s, coffee was an accepted part of (upper caste) Tamil culture, and the debate had shifted to the acceptability of buffalo milk, and the tolerable percentage of chicory. The latter began to be added to coffee in the style of Camp Coffee, a heavily advertised (and racist) British brand that started producing its chicory-laden coffee syrup in 1876 (BBC News, 1999). Coffee's early evangelists C. Rajagopalachari and R. K. Narayan devoted space to coffee in their literary pursuits; the former was said to be mightily pleased if the Kaveri would run with coffee instead of water (Vēṅkaṭācalapati, 2006). Yet in all this time, it remained a South Indian, mostly Tamil obsession, on either side of the caste divide. Tea, which was to colonise Northern undivided India with a massive advertising campaign (as the two world wars interrupted shipping to Europe), was too downmarket for the Tamil Brahmins, says food historian Vikram Doctor (2013).

This is the period of standardisation of 'filter coffee' as it came to be known, often now branded by the Tamil pronunciation '*kaapi*'. While both *Coffea arabica* and *Coffea robusta* beans are acceptable, among traditionalists, it is the peaberry roast of *C. arabica* that is highly prized. Roundedness leads it to being roasted more evenly, giving uniform flavour and aroma (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1911). Other premium grades (by size of bean) are named Plantation A and Plantation B (Katie, 2012). Unadulterated ('degree') cow's milk became the standard among Brahmins, now known as *Kumbakonam Degree Coffee*, in spite of the town of Kumbakonam having no known association with coffee beyond mundane consumption (Gerald, 2012).

The process, now perhaps understood to be an Indian idiosyncrasy, has its origins in the colonial English kitchen. Vikram Doctor pulls out this passage from Culinary Jottings for Madras (1878) by Colonel Kenney-Herbert on coffee-making, a process a filter-coffee maker, male, female or third gender, will not fail to recognise: *the slower the water is added, the more thoroughly the coffee will become soaked, and, the dripping being retarded, the essence will be as strong as possible.* In the 1940's, WWII left the coffee industry stuck with unexportable stocks; low domestic prices and ruined plantations (many would switch to tea) ("Coffee Board, Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Govt. of India; 2014). In order to aggressively market coffee to Indians, the Government of India established the Coffee Board through the Coffee Act VII of 1942 (with 33 members including the Chairman) that started the chain known as Indian Coffee Houses. Famous for their cheap coffee and cutlets, they were a familiar sight in major Indian cities until the 1980s. Most have since downed shutters, unable to meet post-war competition from 'instant coffees' marketed by multinational companies like Nestle and Unilever; and also, the rising culture of the Americanised chain café.

Coffee: The second colonisation of the mind

We will use this space to define the second colonisation in comparative terms, although this author must remark that he[1] is now entering contemporary historical/sociological territory with which he remarks unfamiliarity, except as a consumer:

[1] He/him/his being his chosen pronouns.

First	Colonisation	Second
Britain	Power	America
Imperialism ('Hard Power'), Advertising	Projection of Power	Capitalism ('Soft Power'), Social Media
Bean	Cultural focus	Brew
Developing a domestic market to make up for lost export profits	Motivation	Multinational trade and profit(eering)
Harsh Labour Conditions	Principal Problems	'Modern' Slavery

To Camp Coffee (1876), we must grant the first instance of 'instant coffee', invented (if that's the word) by the Scottish company Paterson & Sons in Glasgow. As Vikram Doctor writes, *"it set a taste standard for how the British felt coffee should taste"*.

Figure 1: Camp Coffee. Fittingly for modern times, the brand was embroiled in a racism row, till it resolved it by repeatedly promoting the Sikh gentleman from orderly to officer.

We might take the 11th of July, 1996 as the benchmark for this new colonisation, with the opening of the first outlet of the Café Coffee Day (CCD) chain at Brigade Road, Bengaluru ("Café Coffee Day", n.d.). Built around Generation X (Dein, 2014), Xennial (Stankorb & Oelbaum, 2014) and Millennial cultures (Howe & Strauss, 2009), CCD introduced the Italian espresso machine (Kummerfeld, 2011) and the barista to common Indians, hitherto restricted to select cafes and enthusiasts in metropolitan cities. On its tailcoats arrived, on 19 October 2012, the emblematic brand of this culture, Starbucks, when it opened its first store in India in Elphinstone Building, Horniman Circle, Mumbai. These chain stores smoothed over old fault-lines, but exposed new ones, of class, and perhaps of generation. This new subculture brings with it a new vocabulary of coffee, couched in terms that would bewilder a senior still familiar with asking for a coffee at self-serve quick-service restaurants in Bengaluru—*cappuccino, americano, frappe,*

espresso, mocha. There is also a language of single origins, and so coffee from Kenya, or Guatemala or Java is available on the same footing as that from Coorg or Wayanad. The Coffee Board, in a delightful keeping up with times and upturned noses, now markets coffee according to various terroirs ranging from *Anamalai's* and *Brahmaputra* to *Araku Valley* and *Wayanaad*. How far these can be distinguished after being put through Colonel Kenney-Herbert's method, or that of Luigi Bezzera, is open to examination.
It has often been North India's first fling with coffee, and all are welcome who bear a loyalty card and appreciate free wi-fi. Yet one fault-line remains, that of class. To those who cannot afford the price of an *espresso* shot (or understand it), the 'cutting chai' is still the beverage of (no) choice. Tea, the elixir sustained by aggressive marketing even today, has yet to transcend the boundary, drawn by sneers from the early 1920s (Doctor, 2013).

In these millennial times, much needed concerns of ethics, sustainability and deconstruction have also been addressed, though the last is often in terms of derision, as the last outrage of the Hipster subculture (Calligeros, 2016). This vocabulary embodies a globalised outlook that transcends India's old fault-lines of caste and region, to an austere, internationalised aesthetic instantly recognisable anywhere in the world (Prospero, 2018). With phrases like 'handpicked selection', 'sustainably farmed', 'premium beans', 'Italian roastery', 'freshly ground' and 'Rainforest Alliance Certified', there is also a focus on the source of the berries (Kaul, 2017), but the old snobbery (if we may call it that) of 'peaberry' or 'Plantation A' or 'no chicory' has given way to how and how et hically and how sustainably the bean was sourced, and also to a new snobbery of how it has been processed. This is a new language, often from New York's East Village, what this author describes as '*Hipster Hittalu*', harking back to a coffee-growing era before the 1830s. Other criticisms abound, one of consumerism driven by social media surveillance and the 'fear of missing out', driving young people to overspend on products whose premium features they cannot afford, and perhaps don't need (Jayaraman, 2016).

Nevertheless, this second colonisation, with the umbilical cord of first mass and then social media, is an ongoing one, and new chapters of it, for now, are still brewing.

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LIFE ON A PLATTER:
TRACING THE NATURE AND MORALITY OF *IKIZUKURI* IN JAPAN

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Abstract: *The paper analyses the Japanese practice of ikizukuri – a style of preparing sashimi from living seafood to attain maximum freshness. It examines the cultural beliefs that lead such dishes to be considered as acceptable and focuses on differing perceptions of animal rights in the East and the West, debating whether restrictions against animal cruelty are universal enough to transcend ethnocentrism and cultural differences.*

The attitudes of people towards food have always represented a curious dichotomy marked by a simultaneous increase in the availability of and desire for exotic dishes and rising awareness about animal rights. The conflict between morality and instinct is something that all modern societies must face, and cuisine is one of the primary areas in which this clash is reflected. Historically, humanity has depended greatly on meat for survival in hostile environments, and over time, this dependency has evolved into a preference that is prevalent in many parts of the world. For most non-vegetarians, the inherent contradiction goes largely unnoticed or ignored.

The moral debate about animal rights has raged for a long time with neither side having achieved a decisive victory so far. Social media in a culture of free expression has provided a massive boost to the movement's popularity, but many organizations rely far too much on shock tactics to gain attention. This emphasis on emotional intensity over objective investigations only furthers conflict instead of resolving it and promotes intense ethnocentrism and oversimplifications of complex issues – operating on condemnation rather than understanding. An idealistic notion like animal rights which is based on the appreciation of differences and a respect for all life, is recklessly elevated into extremism that drives people apart, labels them as evil and violates its own principles. Nonetheless, there have been a few practices that have united both camps in common outrage and disgust, one being the Japanese technique of *ikizukuri*.

Sashimi is raw meat or fish that is served in thin slices, considered one of the most important parts of Japanese cuisine and eaten all across the country. *Ikizukuri*, which translates into 'prepared alive', is considered the pinnacle of sashimi preparation, as it requires great skill and offers a uniquely delicate taste. Unlike in Western restaurants where seafood is kept iced, most Japanese seafood joints keep the fish alive until the moment an order is placed, swimming around in prominently displayed tanks from which the customer may pick a particular creature for the meal. Sashimi chefs train for years to master the art of *ikizukuri*, and preparation is done right before a customer to offer them a meal and a show at the same time. While in most cases the fish is killed via a method called *ikejime* – wherein a spike is driven through its brain for instant death – chefs practicing *ikizukuri* merely knock the fish out to keep it in place while the cuts are made.

The flesh is served along with the body of the fish, and it is presented to the customer with its eyes blinking, lips gasping for breath and its heart exposed and still beating. If these criteria aren't met, then the chef is considered to have failed.

In many cases, analysing the context in which a seemingly immoral action is performed reveals extenuating circumstances. Liao and Meskin (2018) claim that the practice of *ikizukuri* is an example of food immoralism– while food moralists believe that a moral flaw in the preparation of a dish is also an aesthetic flaw, food autonomists feel that a dish's aesthetic appeal is completely separate from its moral value. Food immoralists, however, connect the moral flaws in the preparation of a meal to its aesthetic value, believing that the usage of morally questionable techniques is an indispensable part of the food's taste. This is due to the presence of *traces* in the food- qualities imparted to the dish by its history that we can perceive. Foie gras, for instance, acquires its characteristic fatty taste through the process of force-feeding a goose, and so, the relative immorality involved in its preparation is justified by its taste. On the contrary, torturing a cow before killing it produces no discernible change in the taste of steak, and hence, inflicting pain during its slaughter would be quite unnecessary. These arguments are interesting but also display the problematics of analyzing animal rights from a purely ethical perspective based in universal morality.

The appeal of *ikizukuri* goes beyond a simple matter of taste- the nature of the dishes prepared by this method have their roots in Japanese religion and culture. Japan has always relied on fish as its primary source of meat, especially since other game aren't easy to hunt and find. Draft animals were also rare, and deemed far too useful to kill, leading to a national ban on eating meat imposed in 635 AD. Meat-eating was seen primarily as a Western fashion and only became prevalent after the ban was lifted in the year 1872. In the time preceding and succeeding these changes, fish remained a staple of Japanese cuisine. The edicts of *ahimsa* in Japanese Buddhism do not apply to fish, and this is also reflected in the Animal Welfare and Protection Act of 1973 – Japan's primary law defending the rights of animals. Its rules apply mainly to companion and farm animals, with regulations placed on the treatment of birds, reptiles and mammals – but not fish.

As a result, fish have always been viewed as food in Japanese tradition, to the point where the techniques used in their preparation have crossed into the realms of art. The practice of eating raw fish constitutes an important facet of Japanese culinary philosophy – symbolizing freshness. While Western cooking is based on the idea that ingredients in nature are inedible or imperfect by themselves and must therefore be transformed into something better via the process of cooking; Japanese cuisine promotes the opposite. It is believed that the flavours of nature contain the utmost purity, and so a skilled chef must excel at bringing out the natural essence of the ingredients with minimal interference or modification. For this reason, many first-time eaters of Japanese cuisine describe it as bland and raw. Unlike the explosive flavours of Indian or Mexican food, Japanese dishes stimulate subtle, organic sensations that possess unique textures focusing on how the food feels rather than how it tastes– an element that contributes greatly to the appeal of *ikizukuri*.

Shinto religion in Japan is based on a belief in nature spirits or *kami*, manifesting in rivers, trees, rocks and even people. These spirits are seen as the epitome of divinity and purity and are regularly given offerings at Japanese shrines. Only the best of offerings satisfy the *kami*, so the food offered to them at shrines is composed of the freshest fruits and vegetables as well as living fish. Human beings are expected to imitate the *kami*, thus fresh food is preferred by the people as well. To this end, *ikizukuri* is revered as the height of culinary artistry in Japan. It is the pinnacle of minimalistic cooking and skill displayed on the spot– the product of years of training and incredible precision. The knives used for preparing sashimi are made by the same technique once used to design katana blades (the steel is folded repeatedly to strengthen it till it is strong and flexible at the same time) capable of speed and accuracy unmatched by any other manual cooking tool in the world.

The combination of calculated violence with aesthetic beauty is an integral aspect of Japanese culture. In the Edo Era, samurai often practiced the art of cultivating flowers and sampling fine cuisine to the same degree as their mastery of the killing arts. A trace of that spirit can be seen in the process of *ikizukuri* also. There must be no wasted motion, no hesitation and no theatrical flourishes– merely blurs of motion as blades move in precise lines to capture the essence of the fish and the splendour of the sea, attaining the pinnacle of purity and freshness served on a plate. What is seen as grotesque by an outsider would be admired by a relativist. To a sashimi chef, the sight of a living meal is a mark of utmost pride.

The animal rights debate, however, is not particularly concerned with questions of culture. Victoria Braithwaite (2010) posits that most people automatically assume that fish don't feel pain because they appear alien to us and seemingly don't elicit empathy. However, after extensive research, she found that fish do feel some degree of pain and make efforts to avoid it. It is still unclear whether fish suffer as deeply as other animals or whether their conceptions of pain are as well-defined, but the implications of Braithwaite's findings are still disturbing– the final movements of the animals served in an *ikizukuri* dish could very well be the closest they get to screaming and thrashing in mortal agony.

Reconciling the universality of animal rights with the differences in how animals are perceived in different cultures is one of the biggest challenges of the global animal rights campaign. Cultural relativists might argue that many Japanese are encultured to find the method appealing and therefore have no feelings of guilt while eating live animals, but what happens if the animals don't feel the same way? What if they don't possess a culture to ease them into a resigned acceptance of their fates – the only thing they have are instincts that put them through agony and discomfort while they're being tortured for the tastes of customers. While it is true that i*kizukuri* is a mainstay of Japanese culture, there are several alternatives that are far less cruel and still conform to the ideals of freshness without relying on live animals. The painless *ikejime* method of killing the fish seconds before it is prepared is one such method. The difference is only a matter of seconds, but if fish truly feel pain, then even those few instants are essentially animal torture that merely contribute to a subtle sense of movement in a consumer's mouth before they chomp down on the flesh. The fish must already perish for the customer's enjoyment, but is it necessary for them to suffer as well?

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ANTHROPOPHAGY: THEN AND NOW

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Abstract: *Cannibalism, the practice of eating the flesh of one's own species, is surprisingly more common in nature than one might suppose and the notion that all animals (and human beings) are hardwired against cannibalism is a myth. Beginning with a brief overview of the exoticization of tribal rituals, this article will attempt to analyse the incidence of cannibalistic behaviour in the past as well as the varied hypotheses and controversies linked with this behaviour.*

Contrary to popular imagination, the practice of cannibalism has never been limited to exotic 'savage' tribes. The magnitude and the motivations behind this phenomenon have changed with time and over geographical space. There is no dearth of research on the concept of cannibalism but almost all of it pertains to animals. It is necessary, however, to question the extent to which results from the animal kingdom can be generalized to human beings. Although analogue studies which attempt to apply research findings from experiments on rats, chimpanzees, etcetera to humans, are a regular phenomenon in fields such as psychology; it would be imprudent to apply the expression 'man is an animal' to all contexts. When it comes to matters of mortality and sentience, we as humans consider ourselves to contain an 'essence' that other animals don't possess. This anthropocentric perspective believes that our 'advanced' sentience pushes the boundaries of our behaviours beyond the typical drives/restrictions of biological necessities. As a result, a sharp distinction is made between man and animal and this distinction helps to 'other' the animals we ultimately butcher for meat while simultaneously serving to inhibit such actions amongst ourselves.

Anthropological inquiries

Anthropology as a discipline has had the closest interaction with cannibalism in the case of the Fore people of Papua New Guinea – a country that is still considered by many to be populated with cannibals. The Fore used to conduct a funeral ritual that involved them consuming parts of the brain of their recently deceased relatives in order to 'cleanse their spirits'. Rituals such as these involved complex social negotiations between the two parties – the cannibal and those being consumed. For instance, an anthropological record of the Tupi people of Brazil has indicated that the Tupi had occasionally lived with their captives for months before they were eaten and had also sung to them. This tradition of a musical transaction consisted of the captors taunting their captives with threats and the latter responding with chants of future vengeance. One of the most famous examples of cannibalistic tribes is that of the Maori – an indigenous tribe of New Zealand. Various accounts from early European travellers describe the practice of cannibalism among the Maori. These very accounts go on to portray the Maori as big and muscular, that is, in good physical condition. This has led some researchers such as Auckland University's Prof. Moon to hypothesize that while there could have been periods of hunger occasionally, hunger was not the cause of cannibalism; it was rather a phenomenon of 'post-battle rage' (Masters, 2007).

Anthropologists, especially the armchair kind, validated and possibly augmented the response of early colonizers with their ethnocentric tendencies – as they viewed the societies that were organized differently than their own as 'exotic' or 'savage'. This whole notion of societies progressing on a linear scale from 'savage' to 'barbaric' and ultimately, 'civilized' proposed a rigid hierarchy wherein the last stage was the ideal that societies were expected to aspire towards. Edward B. Tylor's theory of unilineal social evolution went on to show how anthropological theories could serve to 'other' peoples who engaged in such practices and concretize detrimental stereotypes. However, it would be hasty to conclude that all early anthropologists endorsed this approach. Functionalists such as Malinowski considered the role that a practice such as cannibalism could play in maintaining the structure of society (Malinowski, 2015). With tribes such as the Fore who engaged in cannibalism as a funeral ritual, the practice held sociocultural significance as it was a traditional symbol of paying one's respects to the deceased. Malinowski attributed such culturally significant behaviours to inherent underlying biological needs, which in this case could be hunger.

Contemporary moral discourse

The markers of the transition in the perception of cannibalism over the years can be captured through the two aspects of communality and abnormality. While consuming the flesh of persons from the same species has never been a widespread phenomenon, it nevertheless took place on several different occasions and in different contexts (Davis, 2017) (Eveleth, 2013). Previously, motivations for anthropophagy were tied more to its purported cultural significance to the tribes and the feeling of *communitas* that it allowed them to (Turner, 1969). This behaviour when observed by outsiders such as anthropologists or missionaries, although highly condemned, was not considered abnormal behaviour; it was rather a natural part of the 'savage' lifestyle of the tribe.

The cases of cannibalism in the past few decades, however, seemingly indicate an individualistic trend rather than evidence of a collective ritual. This behaviour is also increasingly viewed in association with psychopathy (i.e. psychosexual disorders such as vorarephilia) and an 'obvious' instance of abnormality (Lynkins & Cantor, 2014). Thus, this transition towards the abnormal has led to cannibalism being seen as an individualistic, 'deviant' act often driven by sexual fetishes – the cause for which could probably be attributed to the colonial morality and discourse on the sanctity of human life.

In the face of cannibalism being increasingly defined as a sexual fetish or a sadomasochist choice, a new challenge being faced by governments is probably the difficulty of striking a balance between freedom and safety. For instance, practices such as consensual cannibalism are judged as being harmful to the integrity of human life and society and are therefore condemned. However, upon a closer look at the situation, one could easily argue that whatever acts two consenting adults engage in, in private, is not a matter that concerns the state – an argument that has effectively been put forth in other contexts. To illustrate with an example, an individual who volunteers to be killed and consumed on a fetish website is essentially committing suicide. Therefore, by way of legally prohibiting consensual cannibalism, would a government be officially banning suicide? Conversely, by not taking concrete action, i.e. not banning this practice, one could claim that the government would be guilty of permitting murder.

In an actual case of online cannibalism on a sex fetish website, a German computer technician Armin Meiwes was served a sentence of 8 years (later changed to a life sentence). The sentence was highly debated, especially when viewed in the context of consent, fetish and mental instability (as a result of a psychosexual disorder). It was argued that he should have been rehabilitated instead of being incriminated. Conversely, with respect to the plea of insanity as was claimed by the defense prosecutors in Meiwes' case, there is a need to reconsider what we believe to be a mental disorder. The different types and even symptoms of disease often tend to be cultural constructs and diagnostic manuals such as the ICD (International Classification of Diseases) 10 or DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual) V are not applicable universally across all cultures. Can we then truly claim that all current instances of cannibalism are purely cases of pathology given that such behaviour has not been uncommon in our collective past?

Besides, if overt killing such as during war, genocide and human trafficking don't garner enough public outcry, why do individual consensual killings matter? After all, both cases involve killing other beings of the same species; in fact, unlike the latter, the former does not involve consent whatsoever. The answer to this lies possibly in the emotion associated with the two very different (and yet often concurring) acts of killing and eating. As hunter-gatherers, these tasks coincided – however, the slaughter involved another species and was engaged in to provide nourishment. Most individuals who consciously desire to engage in cannibalism today, however, do not wish to do because they are hungry. Besides, with extensive news of brutalities making headlines on a daily basis, we may be desensitized to a certain extent to premeditated killing, but we aren't desensitized in the same manner to the concept of the victims being consumed thereafter. Thus, while death gains no special attention, it's the consumption that garners the disgust in most cultures.

Ultimately, moralities, and therefore legal consequences of certain actions, differ according to the culture that one finds oneself in. The Thomas theorem which postulates that if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences. This perfectly expresses how realities are imagined or constructed. Thus, as the way in which anthropophagy manifests itself and the justifications for/reactions to it vary across cultures, there can be no absolute universal method in which societies can address it.

Conclusion

The debate surrounding the issue of cannibalism might not be a pertinent one at the moment as it has not (yet) transformed into a large-scale phenomenon. Nevertheless, analysing the course it has taken over the years helps one notice how humans perceive matters of sentience, killing and consumption. The arguments explored, thus, illustrate the intricate social construct of what it means to be human and how our culinary preferences have always been a mere reflection of our culture's moral values.

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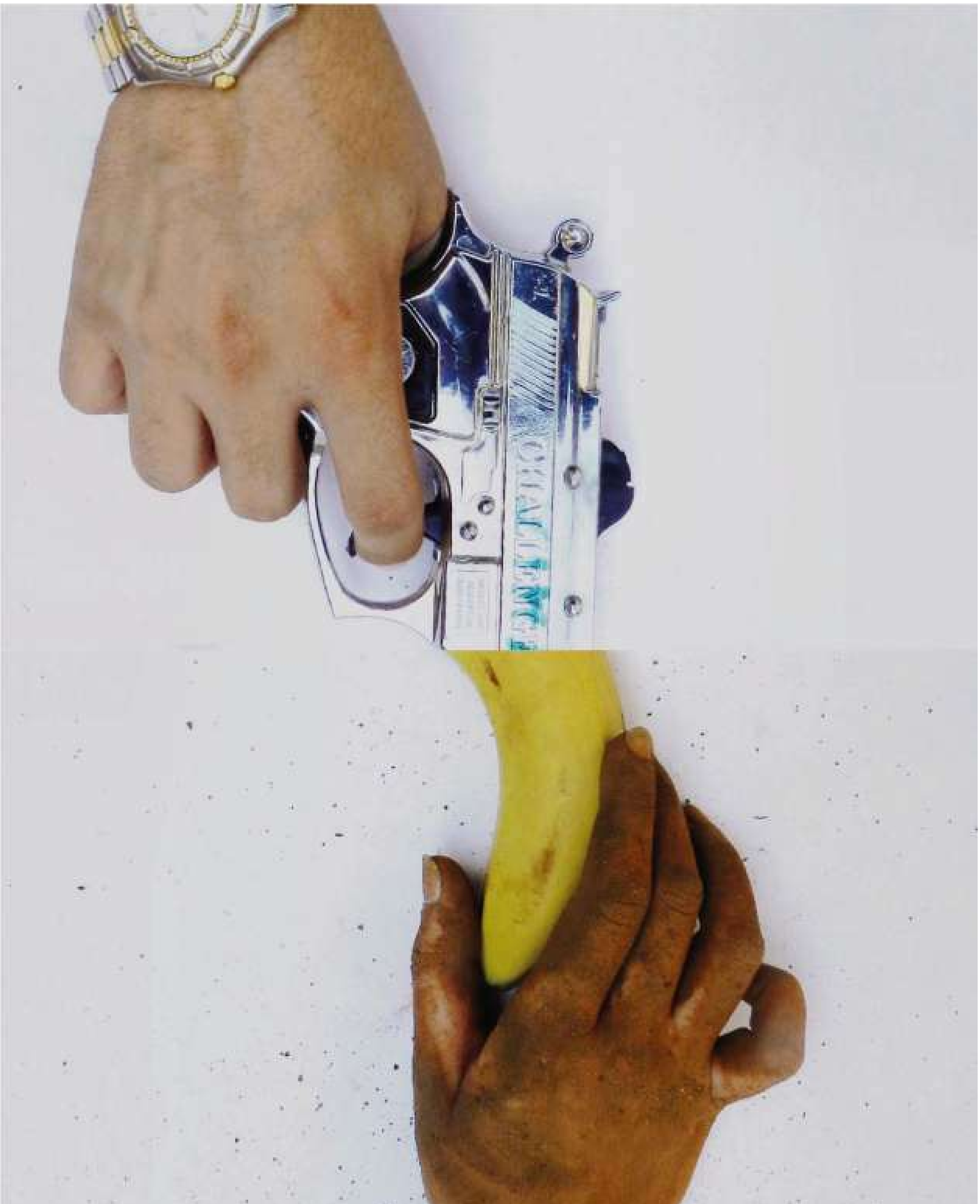

FOOD FUELLED FEUDS:
FOOD AS A CATALYST FOR WAR

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Abstract: *People regard food as a resource that ensures the survival of organisms. However, what happens when food becomes the perpetrator for war, such that empires cease to exist or nations come to the brink of a Third World War? Human history has been characterised by conflicts and this article aims to explore the role played by food in such developments.*

Survival is at the crux of every process that organisms undergo. The Oxford dictionary defines food as "a substance eaten by plants or animals to maintain life" (Hawker, S., & Waite, M. [Eds.], 2007), therefore highlighting the importance of food for an organism's survival. At the same time, conflict and war between various organisms is an instinct to ensure survival and is, therefore, contrary to popular belief, as crucial as the need for food. According to the Darwinian school of thought, survival is the core of all existence; all organisms are fraught with danger and hardships and need to evolve, adapt and strive in whatever way they can to avert their extinction and ensure the perpetuation of their species. Due to productive resources being limited, various species compete against and within each other in order to take possession of productive resources. Usually, an organism's security lies in it knowing that it has accumulated ample resources (land, wealth, power), whose underlying objective is to feed stomachs and ensure survival. This research article aims to deconstruct the notion of food as not just being palatable viands, but to also ponder upon its primary role of survival, by bringing forth various perspectives where food has influenced the course of a war in human history.

Taking an example from ancient Hindu narratives of the Indian subcontinent, the tale of the Battle for the Soma-rasa between the Devas and the Asuras explains the conflict endorsed by food. After being cursed by a sage, the Devas began losing battles against the Asuras, their enemies. In order to restore their glory and power, they plotted to churn the ocean with the Asuras in an act described as the Samudra Manthan, which resulted in the release of an elixir of life- the soma-rasa or the amrit, desired by both the parties (Cartwright, 2016). Despite being a mythical tale, it highlights the importance of food to an organism's survival, and hence, to immortality.

The large apes from whom Homo sapiens, our ancestral species, descended were, and still are, vegetarians. In their quest to attain more food, which was crucial for their survival, they evolved into animal hunters, thereby operationalising food as a catalyst for inter-species conflict. In line with Durkheim's conceptualisation of the 'sacred' and the 'profane', cultural differences exist where a commodity regarded as food by one community is an economic resource for one or sacrosanct for another. Though the meat of cow has been regarded as food in other cultures, uneasiness exists in India over beef as a form of food where it has always been revered as a sacred animal by Hindu communities. Since the ancient times, the cow has been considered as an essential economic resource that yields valuable milk, urine, dung and leather, and to sacrifice and eat such a valuable resource was not readily accepted by the natives as it would imply the destruction of a potential economic resource. The main role of a clan leader was to protect the cows as various clans continuously clashed to gain control of this important economic resource.

“An army marches on its stomach. To be effective, an army relies on good and plentiful food.” - Napolean Bonaparte

Food resources have often been utilised as instruments and weapons, and have impacted warfare to a great extent. Ancient armies have “salted the earth” and destroyed irrigation systems to make an area unsuitable for growing crops. The Punic Wars of 3rd and 2nd centuries B.C.E. witnessed Rome defeating the Carthage Empire by ploughing the land with salt to make it infertile and thereby destroying it. During a famine, battles were postponed till the harvest set in, as in the case of the above war, where Rome postponed the attack on Carthage’s wheat fields, to safeguard her hold over them, which, however, portrays a selfish motive. A similar analogy of a humanitarian nature would be the Parliament at Westminster repealing heavy import duties on Ireland during their potato famine. There have been ample pieces of evidence of well-fed armies winning wars over starved ones, which led to the primary need of a fortress to have adequate storage of food in their granaries to last a siege. Empires have not just been destroyed by wars but also by financial crises caused by food products, as in the case of the Roman Empire, whose increasing import of pepper led to a financial strain on its economy, forcing it to revert to a barter economy and eventually cease to exist.

With the growth of empires all over the world, technological developments took place, which enabled the exploitation of various regions for their food resources. In medieval Europe, an agricultural revolution (1000 C.E.-1300 C.E.) occurred due to advancements in technology, which led to a population explosion. Furthermore, due to the better quality of food available, the increased population was more energetic, dynamic and ripe for action, which served as ideal tools for the aggressive imperialism of the Crusades (Tannahill, 1973). With the fall of Constantinople, Europe’s longing for spices led to geographical explorations opening up the ‘New World’ to them. The roots of colonial imperialism began here, as in the case of the British Indian Empire, when eighty British traders formed the East India Company in 1599 C.E. The exploitation of these regions in the years to follow can thus be traced to the need for food. The Aztec clans residing during 16th century C.E. believed that the human heart was the finest offering made to the Gods, from which the Gods drew strength, which led them to believe that humans could do the same by consuming the flesh of their sacrificed opponents. Although this cannibalistic behaviour in Aztec culture was heavily looked down upon by the colonisers, its cultural significance reveals the manner in which food played a vital role in society.

With the emergence of nationalism all over the world, food resources were also utilised to defy the existing political authority. In the case of British India, although the grease of cows and pigs was being used to develop a better form of firearms- the Enfield Rifle, the deep religious unease felt by the Hindus and Muslims sparked off India's "First War of Independence" in 1857 C.E. Another noteworthy movement was the Dandi March undertaken by Mahatma Gandhi in 1930 C.E. Salt has always been one of the most crucial food commodities for human beings, for its application in food preservation, culinary taste, and flavour, apart from its primary requirement for the metabolism of the body. During the colonial rule in India, the British exercised a monopoly over salt production by imposing a massive salt tax on domestic manufacturers. Gandhi launched his Civil Disobedience Movement against the British through this act, where he and his supporters produced salt without paying the obligatory tax to the British authorities. An earlier account against the East India Company was in 1773 C.E., wherein the Americans utilised Tea, to challenge the Tea Act, which allowed the Company to sell tea from China to its American colonies without paying taxes. Their act of throwing chests of tea from the ships into the Boston harbour has been called as the 'Boston Tea Party' and eventually escalated into the American Revolution. Such acts were a blow to British supremacy and inspired various national movements across the world such as the French Revolution, the Russian Revolution and the First Opium War.

Increasingly in recent years, water as a food resource has incited many conflicts around the world. ISIS rebels have tried to gain control over the upper reaches of Tigris and Euphrates, the two great rivers of West Asia, on which Iraq and Syria depend for food, water and industry. Iraq and Syria, both are arid regions but instead of working together to improve their situation, have instead been targeting each other's water resources. Conflicts also occur on a subnational level over the control for water, as in the case of the Kaveri dispute between the Indian states of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. The exploitation of water resources by multi-national corporations and the resistance put forth by the locals is a common conflict stemming from the issue of water control, availability, and access. The protests by the local population of Mehdiganj in Uttar Pradesh and Plachimada in Kerala against Coca-Cola gained worldwide recognition. Coupled with growing environmental concerns around global warming and the severe degradation of the world's water reserves, it is, therefore, of no surprise that scholars prophesy a Third World War over the issue of water.

"Man consists of the essence of food. From food all creatures are produced, and by food do they grow." - Taittiriya Upanishad

The above quote highlights the importance of food and provides a look into why people consider it as a life-sustaining resource. However, the discussion mentioned above also explores the way in which food resources have fuelled various conflicts throughout the history of human civilisation. It is ironic how something essential for our survival is fuelling the destruction of our species. The manner in which politics and warfare due to control over food resources have been occurring in the contemporary era does not portray a way for a better future. Vandana Shiva's concept of Eco-apartheid highlights this situation very well, where the Earth's resources are appropriated in a discriminatory manner, leading to a gap between humans and nature and creating conflict amongst various sections of society.

The issue of communalism in India has taken on a whole new magnitude in the current scenario, involving society, polity and economy, fuelled by religious sentiments. The element of food has been able to penetrate its way to this sphere too and fuel the conflict in the form of lynching due to beef consumption. The issue is one of cultural difference where communalist sentiments build up as "disrespect" is portrayed towards religious icons, which are considered as food in another culture. Such conflicts are volatile enough to bring about more global wars. The insecurity over food has gone to such extents that organisations hoard food, which results in an artificial scarcity and further fuels conflict; a situation which makes one wonder if created scarcity could be compared to the arms race that led to the First World War. However, then again, maybe the destruction and regeneration is to ensure the perpetuation of our species; a philosophy that can also be observed in the epistemology of the Hindu Trinity.[2]

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United Nations: A Saviour?

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Abstract: *As multiple regions across the globe are harrowed by civil war, the Global North continues to dictate policy not only in terms of 'mediation' of the conflict, but also in terms of rescue and rehabilitation. This article looks at the Syrian crisis and explores the effectiveness of the aid offered by these nations and its impact on the population as it attempts to restore normalcy in the region.*

The 21st century has been characterized by an intensified need to globalize and an increased interdependence between nations. In the economic, social, cultural and political spheres, the world has been a witness to nations competing as well as relying on each other at every available opportunity, be it in terms of fuel prices or national elections. The policy of isolation is a phenomenon of the past as it is virtually impossible to maintain independence in the face of rising conflict. With finite number of resources and their unequal distribution among nations, conflict is inevitable. This is especially relevant in relation to food and its limited availability across countries. In the past few years, these conflicts have taken a violent turn with several cases of protests, famines, droughts and even outright civil war. The case of Syria follows an unfortunate but unique series of events comprising every conflict known to man. While initially Syria was one of the only countries in the Levant exporting goods, it has now been reduced to a shadow of its former self.

In 2008- 2009, Syria suffered one of the worst famines that destroyed its self-sufficient agricultural economy and subjected its citizens to scarcity and subsequent distress. The already disgruntled population began to protest against the government of Bashar-Al-Assad in 2011. As the government retaliated with force, Syria was thrown into the midst of a civil war. The rebels and government forces began the use of advanced weaponry to conquer territories, as a mechanism to prohibit the passage of basic amenities like food and water for the population. Additionally, with the destruction of land due to the usage of chemical weapons as well as the collapse of agriculture, millions of Syrians face the risk of death due to starvation while others continue to be severely malnourished. The international community has, in response to this, offered millions of dollars in terms of foreign aid. This aid has taken several forms, from offering a place to stay for the refugees to providing food and medicines to those struck by disaster. The United Nations has, in particular, directed much of its resources to not only hold diplomatic conferences to end the conflict, but also to provide aid in terms of both cash and kind- to ensure that Syrian citizens receive adequate amounts of nutrition in times of war. This aid is generally multilateral in nature, with various governments collaborating to lend resources to Syria. Apart from this, several nations, led by the United States are also engaging in bilateral aid to the Syrian state. While this aid is perceived to be humanitarian in nature, the ground reality paints a different picture. In general, food aid is accompanied by clauses that seek to benefit the donor nation either economically, or by creating a pathway for interventions in the domestic policies of the recipient nation (Food Aid- Global Issues, 2019). While the actual amount of aid reaching the entire population is markedly less than that which is offered, around $7 billion, an even larger problem is the conditions that come attached to the aid received by Syria from several donor nations. By way of this article, I examine the glitches in the food aid offered by the United Nations. I also look at the hidden power relations between developed and so-called developing nations and their possible implications on Syria's development post the war.

The Syrian territory has been fragmented into areas occupied by the government, rebel forces and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. All these areas require immediate aid in terms of food and clean water. Their economies have collapsed and they must increasingly depend on international food aid. This foreign aid, while rapidly available, risks doing more harm than good to the recipient nation in the long run. The aid provided in terms of food is done either in cash or kind. While it may provide immediate relief, nations run the risk of becoming permanently dependent on food aid. Moreover, with faulty policies that prevent the distribution of adequate food to all parts of enemy occupied areas, the effectiveness of food aid can be called into question.

In war-torn areas, the provision of food aid is theoretically, one of the best policies designed to preserve human dignity. In practice, however, these provisions are marred by power struggles between multiple nations as well as internal players, corruption and the basic struggle for survival. Foreign nations utilize food aid to promote their national interests, insisting on sending food produced only in their nations. Thus, while labelled to be humanitarian, food aid is typically used to benefit the economy of the donor nation. The treatment of developing nations like Syria as dumping grounds for surplus as well as the interference in their affairs is much akin to 20th century colonization. While colonization implied the physical capture of a nation, a more covert method of economic colonization is being utilized in the 21st century. Today, developed nations have the resources to force a developing nation to depend on it without having to actually conquer it. Although the means have changed, the detrimental effects remain the same. Thus, developed nations like the United States, which form the 'core', dictate international development policy and use their power to create hurdles for the development and hence, eventual independence of nations like Syria. For instance, although Syria has not been captured by a particular nation, the very existence of its population now depends on the aid provided by the foreign nations. Moreover, after the war, this 'aid' will be reimbursed in terms of reduced oil prices and puppet rulers favouring a particular nation. This proxy conquering speaks to the inhumanity of politics and international relations, wherein the loss of life of civilians is considered collateral damage in an effort to ensure a stronger economy and thus, to remain powerful.

Another controversy with relation to food aid is its effectiveness in terms of its accessibility to the population. The United Nations, which is one of the major agencies coordinating and advocating for the provision of food relief, itself has major flaws in terms of policy. Humanitarian assistance must be provided in accordance with the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality. This implies that it must be provided equally without any form of discrimination on the basis of ideology or affiliation. An additional clause states that in terms of conflict, the aid will be deferred to the sovereign, which means that the aid is handed to the Assad government who then must distribute these resources to every Syrian citizen equally. These archaic laws form the crux of the problem. Since the government regulates the distribution of food, it is impossible for food to reach rebel occupied areas (Sparrow, 2013). Thus, these provinces form some of the worst conditions for the people. The government, through systemic decision making, is prohibiting the sale of resources in an effort to get the rebel forces to surrender. This flouts several human rights laws, and the aid provided is in turn used to finance the war effort. This is possible because the dollars provided for aid are used by the government to subsidize food in government occupied areas or to sell them at increased prices in rebel areas. The profits incurred are utilized by the government to purchase machinery and offer an alternative method of income to a government that faces several sanctions from the United Nations itself (Martinez, 2016). The problem with the policy of the UN is similar due to the fatal flaws in the UN itself. With only five nations having a veto power on major decisions, clashes are bound to occur. Moreover, with respect to Syria, with Russia and the United States, the biggest stakeholders in the UN as well as in the Syrian crisis, sitting on opposite ends of the war, a marked change in policy would lead to a dramatic disadvantage for either one of the nations. Thus, these laws cannot be amended, and the only significant loss, that of human life, is considered fair game in view of the bigger picture.

A more interesting angle to the aid provided however, is the methods that Syria will eventually have to employ to repay these loans. When an aid is offered, there is an underlying feeling of superiority adopted by the donor. It permits them to dictate policy in the recipient nation, regulate trade, and eventually increase dependence on the donor aid (Hambrecht, 2018). For instance, war torn Syria faces a long road of recovery, similar to that of post WW II. It must restructure itself in terms of infrastructure, politics as well as economy. It must also rehabilitate the millions that have been displaced as a result of the conflict, and transition from a war economy to a more sustainable peaceful one. In this process, it is bound to require a continuation of aid. This aid will dictate which sector receives more attention, and the direction in which the country positions itself. Another way that Syria specifically can return the favours is through the oil it possesses. The United States, which is the largest foreign aid provider to Syria, will most likely demand a lowered rate for Syrian oil, increasing the dollar value and further strengthening its economy as compared to that of Russia. Additionally, especially in terms of food security, food aid received might do more harm than good. As observed in Haiti and Somalia, the aid received is disproportionate, causing an imbalance and transition in the agricultural practices of the country. If aid is being provided in the form of grains, for example, the overall grain production in the country will reduce as it will be unable to compete with the subsidized aid. Thus, the economy will grow to depend on this aid, making it that much more difficult for Syria to restore itself to its former glory.

The Syrian problem is one of the many that face the world. There are similar conflicts in Yemen, South Asia and Africa. While this article specifically deals with the issue of food aid, it does not do justice to explore the actual economic benefits received by donor nations. Moreover, the long-term challenges faced by nations recovering from war need to be probed in detail. Thus, while Syria proves to be a prominent example to examine the loopholes existing in UN policy, the power relations in the exercise of UN sanctions and policies can provide a better image of the scope of contemporary international relations.

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CASTE ON A PLATE

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Abstract: *The Caste System has found its association with food: from the ingredients to how the food is prepared, everything has been decided by one's caste. This paper aims to look at how and why there is a divide between Dalit and Brahmin food, and also at the ideas of "purity" and "impurity". It also aims to focus on the representation of Dalit food in mainstream media.*

When Charles de Gaulle complained about the difficulty of governing a country with 264 types of cheese, he was probably unaware about India, where food and preparations of food change with one's region, culture, religion, and most importantly caste. The caste system has also found its way in bringing about a distinction between what is 'pure' and 'impure'. Caste has infiltrated Indian eating habits in such a way that one's caste defines the ways in which what one can eat, how one can prepare their food and with whom one can share it. British anthropologist Mary Douglas (1966) posits that the idea of "purity" affects every facet of daily life. In this way, the Brahmanical ideology has managed to seep into the caste system. This idea of purity and impurity has resulted in the overrepresentation of upper caste food and underrepresentation of Dalit food. Restaurants popping up in different cities around the world are known for serving pure *Iyengar Brahmin* or *Saraswat Brahmin* food or non-vegetarian cuisines from other upper caste food cultures. Dalit cuisines like the Red Ant *chutney*, *Rakti* (coagulated blood), etc. are eliminated from the ambit of Indian cuisines.

Govind Ghurye (1950) said that all food is divided into *kacha* (cooked only in water) and *pakka* (cooked in ghee without adding water). "As a rule a man will never eat *kacha* food unless it is prepared by a fellow caste-man, which in actual practice means a member of his own endogamous group, whether it be caste or sub-caste, or else by his Brahman 'guru' or spiritual guide." (Ghurye, 1979). According to G.S. Ghurye, a Brahmin was allowed to accept only *pakka* food from the hands of an individual from a lower caste, and in no way were they allowed to accept *kacha* food from an individual from a lower caste. Dalits were considered to be impure because of what they ate (e.g. animal carcass) and the work they did (e.g. removing human waste or dead cattle). As per the rule, a Brahmin was never to accept food from a Dalit since food made by their hands were considered to be 'polluted' or 'impure' of the highest level.

This idea of purity and impurity has made Dalit food highly underrepresented. In the 2015 Masterchef India, it was decided that the show would opt for only vegetarian food in order to make it more 'inclusive' because the main judge chef Sanjeev Kapoor believed that most Indians were vegetarians, which is unlikely to be true because a majority of Indians do consume meat. Underrepresentation has made Dalit food an unknown phenomenon. However, Amit Masurkar's 2017 film, *Newton*, tried to challenge this underrepresentation with one scene. The main character– Newton, an educated man, was shocked to see that Malko – a woman assigned to help Newton with the election booth in the tribal area that she belonged to– picked up a few ants for snacking. When expressing his shock, Malko responded by saying, “What’s interesting is the fact that you live a few hours away from this place, but know nothing about it.” This is a sharp comment that wasn’t only meant for Newton, but for everyone in the audience who have ignored Dalit food. In 2010, world renowned chef Gordon Ramsay decided to tour India to document the beauty of Indian food and made a visit to the Naxal prone region of Bastar in Chhattisgarh. When living in Bastar Gordon Ramsay tried the famous Red Ant Chutney, which he called the best and healthiest chutney. Such shows took small steps towards representing Dalit food.

Dalit food, other than being stigmatized and underrepresented, has also become highly politicized in India. The event of Amit Shah and Rahul Gandhi lunching with Dalits was supposed to be an extraordinary act, but to their dismay many activists pointed out that this move was nothing but mere vote bank politics. The recent beef ban can also be an example of Upper caste sentiments about food still prevails. According to Kancha Ilaiah, a prominent Dalit activist and author of *Why I’m not a Hindu (1996)*, the beef ban is a cultural imposition on the Dalits and the tribals. Historically, Dalits found their main source of food through beef and the carcasses of other animals. Beef was usually consumed by the Dalits because of its wider availability and poverty among the lower castes. Many activists have pointed out that the beef ban is not all about protecting cows, it has a deeper reason behind it. It is not only to bring about a difference between Hindus and non-Hindus, but also to bring about a divide between the upper castes and the Dalits. It is a way to enforce upper caste ideologies and practices into the lives of the Dalit communities. The lynching of Dalits- like the one incident in June 29, 2017 when a man accused of carrying beef was beaten to death by a mob in Jharkhand (in the name of ‘*Gau Raksha’*) is a product of this superiority and enforcement of superior ideologies.

Untouchability as a practice also emerged in India to put a ban on beef consumption. Upper caste Hindus ostracized other beef-eaters, which included Dalits, Muslims and Christians. However, it would be unfair to believe that historically it was only the Dalits who consumed beef. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar argued that, Brahmins themselves were one of the greatest beef-eaters. They not only gave up beef eating but also started worshipping the cow as a deliberate strategy. “The clue to the worship of the cow is to be found in the means adopted by Brahmanism to establish supremacy over Buddhism” (Ambedkar, 1948). Ambedkar said that the ‘The Broken Men’ hated the Brahmins because the Brahmins were the enemies of Buddhism because of their conversion. He viewed that the untouchables were The Broken Men who belonged to a different tribe and had different totems which were contrasting the totems of the Hindus of the villages. Ambedkar believed that the Brahmins disliked The Broken Men who converted into Buddhism because they did not employ them as priests and preached against the Brahmins who imposed untouchability upon the Dalits because they would not leave Buddhism. The continuation of beef eating by The Broken Men when it was given up by the others made the Brahmins treat them as Untouchables. On this reasoning it is possible to conclude that one of the roots of untouchability lies in the hatred and contempt that the Brahmins had against the newly converted Buddhist.

Hindus are divided into two groups: the vegetarians and the (non-beef) meat eater. These two groups have something in common, and it is their united objection towards beef-eaters. This issue around beef eating results in treating a group of people as impure beings and untouchables. When talking about this purity and impurity factor of food one might question why Dalits resort to eating the carcass of dead animals and beef. It was mainly because of poverty and social exclusion. Dalits having been poor could not afford to have *halal* or live meat; this led them to fill up their empty stomachs through the remains of dead animals. Even with vegetarian food, Dalits had to look for food that was cheaper and usually not so popular or the disposed part of the vegetable/grain. They usually feasted on *mota anaaj* (coarse grains), *makkay ka chawal* (rice made from corn), *chapatis* made out of pea flour, etc. Anything not consumed by the upper caste was the only freely available food for the Dalits. Urmila Pawar in her book *The Weave Of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs* said, "The rich stored the flesh of *sode* (shrimps, prawns), *tisrya* (clams) or *mule*; poor people stored the water in which these fish were boiled. The stock was boiled till it became a thick-like sauce and was then stored in bottles."

With dishes like *rakti* or the rat dish eaten by the Musahars in Bihar; one might ponder over why Dalits resorted to eating food of this kind. Dalit food was not a matter of choice or preference. They had to feed themselves only on the limited range food that was freely available to them. The Brahmaincal hegemony has also brought about this issue of unavailability of food for the Dalits. In India, one's food habits are also an important determinant of caste. The food that you eat determines if you can walk around with your head high with pride, or if you have to walk around with a broom on your waist declaring your arrival with a bell.

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THE FLAVOUR OF RACISM - THE MYTH OF MSG

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Abstract: *The taste of food is of equal or, often times, greater importance than its nutritional value and health impact. But sometimes, this dynamic is flipped and the food from an entire community is boycotted. The story of MSG with its close association with Chinese food tells us of how an incorrect understanding of science can be used as a tool to ostracize certain foods and the people who consume them.*

Sweet, sour, bitter and salty are all flavours we can recognize easily. Umami or savoury, while not as distinct a taste as chocolate or lemon, is in fact another flavour that we can identify. MSG (Monosodium Glutamate) is a flavour enhancer usually used in Chinese food to enhance this flavour. For decades, it has been linked to the 'Chinese Restaurant Syndrome' that is said to cause a variety of symptoms from mild headaches, heart palpitations and chest pain to more extreme cases like brain damage and asthma. Recent studies like the ones conducted by Geha, et. al in 2000 have shown that there is no link between the symptoms and the consumption of Chinese food containing MSG. However, fear and scepticism towards the use MSG persist till date.

Japanese chemist Ikeda Kikunae discovered MSG in 1908 and created the additive Monosodium Glutamate which was the Umami flavour in its purest form. In 1909, the company Ajinomoto began selling it to the Japanese masses. In China, another company named Tian Chu marketed MSG as a rival to Ajinomoto and it too, gained massive popularity in China in the 1930s and became a staple ingredient in the preparation of Chinese food (Sands, 2005). MSG soon became synonymous with East Asian cuisine, mainly Chinese cooking. It reached the American shore in the 1920s and was used mainly in canned goods and military rations. MSG also reached America through immigration, primarily the Chinese and Japanese immigrants. In the 1930s and 1940s, there was an emergence of interest in Chinese cuisine (Sands, 2005). During this time, MSG enjoyed public approval with American households adopting into their own food.

The 1960s were a decade characterized by a mistrust of chemicals in food and chemicals in general. Chemonoia, the paranoia of chemicals, typically man-made ones can be traced back to this decade in America (Robson, 2016). What began with Silent Spring, Carson's (1964) scathing critique of the pesticide DDT, opened the floodgates to a greater concern about chemicals and their impact. The first to fall were artificial sweeteners Saccharin and Cyclamate and soon, MSG was to follow (Sands, 2005).

Within this backdrop, the now infamous letter written by written by Dr. Robert Ho Man Kwok (1968) published in the New England Journal of Medicine is largely believed to be the cause of the persecution of MSG. Dr Kwok coined the term 'Chinese Restaurant Syndrome' by claiming that eating Chinese food at restaurants caused 'numbness at the back of the neck, gradually radiating to both arms and the back, general weakness and palpitation'. He attributed this to a variety of possible causes like alcohol, soy sauce and high sodium content as well as MSG. Soon the New England Journal of Medicine was flooded many more such letters that stated restaurant goers experienced a variety of symptoms ranging from a profuse, cold sweat, a 'Chinese Headache'- a headache caused specifically by eating Chinese food- and dizziness (Schaumburg, H. 1968) The story was soon picked up by the press who was quick to claim MSG was the culprit behind this phenomena.

It is easy to look at the literature and assign blame to Dr Kwok for it. However, had the American society not already been biased towards the Chinese; this phenomenon would not have had the reach heights it did in the 1970s. The 70s were part of the second wave of Chinese immigration to America. While the Chinese first immigrated to America almost a century ago, Chinese immigrants had a hard time assimilating within the American society, partly due to laws like the Exclusion Act of 1882 which prohibited immigration of all Chinese Labourers (Goyette, 2017). It was the first law of its kind, imposing an immigration ban on the citizens of an entire country. Till the 1979, the United States of America did not even recognize the People's Republic of China. The Asian American Movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s was a direct response to the racism of the era having many achievements, most notably coining the term "Asian American" to replace the term "Oriental" (Maeda, 2016).

The American mainstream media too has a role to play in the marginalization of Chinese Americans and East Asians in general. While 'yellow face', the practice of putting on makeup and prosthetics to make an actor look Asian has been in Hollywood since the 1930s, white-washing, the practice of casting Caucasian actors to play the roles given to ethnic minorities in other mediums of the work, create controversies to this day. All this leads to a skewed representation of Asians American media further exoticising of Chinese Americans. Even within news media, Fox News host Jesse Watters had come under fire for an interview he did at in Chinatown which was dubbed as "vile, racist behaviour" by the Mayor of New York, de Blasio (Stack, 2016).

Edward Said, in his work on 'orientalism' in 1978, wrote extensively about how the West views the East as exotic and believes itself to be morally superior. While he focused on the Middle East, his theories can be applied to East Asia as well. Said wrote about how the scholarly articles the West writes about the East are skewed and biased which hinders cultural understanding. Research on MSG in the 1970s and 1980s played into the fear of the public and while it is now deemed faulty, it continues to dictate the direction of the popular opinion on MSG. Later research found, that within an acceptable limit MSG is perfectly safe to consume. In the Review of Alleged Reaction to Monosodium Glutamate and Outcome of a Multicenter Double-Blind Placebo-Controlled Study (Gehan, et al, 2000) it was found that individuals who consumed MSG with food did not experience any symptoms that the control group who was given a placebo did not experience. A review of human studies also found that previous studies were flawed in one way or another and there is no statistically significant correlation between the symptoms and the consumption of MSG (Obayashi, Nagamura, 2016).

While there was much ambiguity to symptoms of the Chinese restaurant syndrome, its fear had real consequences. The Chinese restaurant owner and chefs were pressured into dropping it as an ingredient. "No MSG" signs were put up in restaurant windows all over Chinatowns, in the USA due to the fact that they served not just Chinese immigrants but also are a popular dining destination of authentic Chinese food among Non-Chinese Americans. Even with the latest verdict that MSG is harmless; many chefs refuse to cook with it in their restaurants, even though they use it liberally for their personal cooking. 42% of American consumers say they prefer to avoid MSG according to the International Food Information Council (Dewey, 2018). MSG is the 6th most avoided added ingredient after sugar, sodium, preservatives, artificial colour and artificial flavour. To put things in perspective, the 7th most avoided ingredient is caffeine a drug shown to have similar chemical changes in the brain like cocaine (Malave, & Broderick, 2014). While coffee has perpetrated into the mainstream, MSG continues to be a fringe ingredient which according to many is safer to avoid.

You are what you eat. And to the rest, MSG- the exotic ingredient from the East that made Americans sick- could not and should not be consumed. However, MSG is a popular ingredient to add to processed food like chips and other such snacks. Popular American manufactures like Pringles and Doritos also use MSG yet these items never elicit responses such as headaches from the consumer. The Chinese restaurant syndrome hardly comes into effect when eating a bag of chips; indicating that the side effects were not physiological but psychosomatic response to the food of an already misunderstood community. The racist stereotype that the Chinese add dog meat to their food instead of chicken to cut costs already persist, it is thus not a great leap for people to assume the worst of their Chinese food.

When America sneezes, the world catches a cold. The fear of MSG spread all over the world, even back home to Japan. While its impact was much smaller there compared to America, the "No added MSG" sign is often printed in packets of processed food. In China however, MSG has thrived, even to the extent that Chinese scientists are claiming that there might be health benefits to it. The consumption of MSG has only risen, with its use in 95% of restaurants and 70% households daily. Attitudes towards their food by the Americans are of little concern to China (Rosenthal, 2000). While the world moves towards a more homogenous cultural understanding, this dichotomy further isolates Chinese from the West.

American Sociologist Du Bois introduced double consciousness, how two identities of an individual are often at odds with each other due to societal pressures and prejudices. While Du Bois was mainly referring to African American identity, his theories can be applied to any community within America which was at one point was deemed to be the "other". While America is known to be the land of the immigrants, as Lady Liberty asks for “your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free” so comes the duality between the home left behind and the home now settled in. Despite being a cultural melting pot, it is expected for the immigrants to adopt the values of the new land while abandoning those of their homeland.

Renowned chef Anthony Bourdain is famously quoted to have said, “You know what causes the Chinese Restaurant Syndrome? Racism.” The chefs in the Chinese restaurants had to give up an essential ingredient of their cuisine so they could keep their business afloat. While they use MSG to cook at home as have their parents and grandparents, they leave out a part of culture when they cook for their restaurant. The future of MSG, however, looks bright. The next generation of Chinese chefs are deliberately using MSG as more than a flavour enhancer. They are also using it as statement against the previous believed misconceptions and the debunked Chinese Restaurant Syndrome. The lessons we can learn from this are universal, that science should always remain impartial and unbiased towards the public opinion or it ceases to be empirical.

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FINGERS, FORKS AND CHOPSTICKS: ANALYSING DINING ETIQUETTE THROUGH A FUNCTIONALIST PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: *The paper analyses various dining practices, specifically in the Indian context, through the school of functionalism. It attempts to understand dining etiquette in its social context and explores the cultural roots of certain dining practices. The paper also aims to understand how certain forces of change, such as globalisation and technology, have impacted dining practices.*

One of the basic needs of man is to satisfy hunger, which is insatiable. Along with the question *'what to eat?',* another significant question is *'how to eat?'.* This question could be addressed through the domain of dining etiquette, which refers to the rules that govern the behaviour of people while eating. Margaret Visser in *The Rituals of Dinner (2015),* explores how dining etiquette changed with the times by citing an example of Ancient Fijians (a cannibal tribe) who ate their regular meals with their hands but used a special wooden fork to eat human meat. This ritual was used to mark the speciality of the occasion as compared to everyday meals. Visser goes a step further to argue that even today, we follow rituals during seemingly casual meals or at eateries such as McDonald's. At McDonald's, the element of standardization is evident at every branch. She points out that *"the staff wears distinctive garments, menus are same and it attempts to play a role of the loveable host".* This is also ensured by offering toys to children. In this article, the social framework of dining etiquette has been analysed through the functionalist perspective. According to the functionalist perspective, *"society is a system of interconnected parts that work together in harmony to maintain a state of balance and social equilibrium for the whole"* (Mooney, Knox & Schacht, 2007).

In a country as diverse as India, eating styles of a given group help assert its collective identity (Beardsworth & Keil, 2018). Therefore, dining etiquette plays a role in establishing cultural identity, by indicating group differences and similarities. For example, the distinct use of the banana leaf instead of solid utensils for eating is specific to South Indian communities. This practice was prevalent before metal became the mainstay as banana leaves were in abundance in the environment. The practice also minimizes the cost incurred on utensils and effort required to clean them. Thus, the practice promotes sustainability, which is a key element in the South Indian food discourse. The use of the banana leaf was gradually ritualized, becoming a part of the community's cultural identity and is practiced even today during special occasions and festivals.

Core values of particular cultures also find expression in their dining etiquette. One example is of 'sharing' as a core value and the different ways in which communities share food. The Bohri Muslim community use a *thal* (a huge platter) that is placed in the centre and the family members sit around it while dining. Then the dish is served in the middle of the *thal* and each member takes their share. The quantity of food served is such that it ensures minimum wastage. The practice acts as a tool to strengthen family bonds and further highlights the importance of family as functional unit in their culture. Sharing customs have also been extended to include deities, ancestors and even other organisms. The Maharashtrian community has a specific period called *pitrupaksha* during which they serve food to crows in remembrance of their ancestors. This practice is rooted in the belief of rebirth, as feeding crows is considered as satisfying the *pitra* or ancestors. The practice not only invokes respect for ancestors but also helps connect one with the environment. Etiquette is also used to express the value of gratitude wherein the practice of starting a meal with a prayer of thanks and offering to god is prominent in many Hindu communities. This practice marks the belief of thanking the one who provides the food and reinforces the belief of karma where every individual is obliged to pay his gratitude for what he gains.

Certain dining etiquette reflect the power dynamics in social relations. This can be noted in rules that dictate *how* and *with whom* food can be shared. For example, under the rigid caste system, the upper caste community of *Brahmins* would not accept food offered by people belonging to a lower caste group. This is because they could only accept *pakka* food (food cooked in upper caste households using pure *ghee*) as opposed to *kachcha* food (food cooked by lower caste using water or oil) cooked by the lower castes. In another practice, if an upper caste person wanted to give food to a lower caste person, then he would drop it instead of placing it on their plate. This practice is based on the concept of 'pollution' which claims that the lower caste pollutes the purity of an upper caste person. These restrictions on social interactions and such restrictions ultimately defined one's social status and identity thus indicating how some dining manners work to exclude certain social groups. From the conflict perspective, this practice has been subjected to criticism as it deprives the lower caste of equal opportunity. However, functionalism would see the dining practice as a means to support the stratification that ensures a static society balance. On the other end of the spectrum, some dining practices aim to promote inclusion and equality. For example, the *prasad* offered to God in temples and *langar* served to devotees at *Gurudwaras* are distributed without caste discrimination. The Shirdi temple in Maharashtra, is renowned for its community kitchen. Food is cooked using solar energy and is offered to every devotee as *prasad* of that saint. This tradition helps to reduce social inequality because every devotee irrespective of their social status, economic background or religion is served the same food and given the same position to sit without any hierarchical discrimination.

According to functionalism, society works smoothly because different institutions work together in harmony. Due to the interrelated nature of these institutions, changes in any one institution leads to change in another. Evolution and adaptation are inevitable and dining manners are no exception in this regard. This point can be illustrated using the concept of dining tables. While dining tables were widely used in the West and were introduced to Indians only through the process of Westernisation, the dining table evolved as a way to seat the family for a meal together. While the popular Indian manner was to sit on the floor cross-legged while eating, a yogic posture called *'Padmasana',* this way of sitting is not as prominent anymore, especially in urban households. However, journalist Vikram Doctor points out that as the popularity of dining tables in India continues to grow, the irony is that Western societies are drifting away from it, as families most often eat together only on special occasions or festivities. Another example of Indian traditions being replaced in favour of Western ones is the practice of eating food with cutlery instead of using one's fingers. Traditionally, Europeans considered the Indian tradition of eating with one's hands as uncivilized, in line with their Eurocentric discourse on health and hygiene. This resulted in the decline of this tradition, especially among the elite. This can be traced through the signs of cultural assimilation in the simplest of habits such as how Indians have started eating *idlis* and *vadas* with spoons and forks as opposed to using their fingers. However, the tradition has been revived in an attempt to reclaim one's cultural identity, at least to some extent, by acknowledging its benefits. Some hotels have taken a lead to revive Indian traditions by encouraging customers to eat with hands. The ITC Bukhaara at Delhi was one of the first to promote this concept. *"*We used to ape the West. Now they emulate us. Education and travel have made Indians realize the value of our own traditions. Eating Indian food in home style will be the new trend to show off*,"* said the Executive Chef Uddipan Chakravarthy of Vivanta by Taj, Bengaluru. However, it should be noted that legitimation by the elite plays a role in the revival of this practice.

Taking the example of another Asian culture, Japan's cuisine is also family-oriented which ensures sharing and family bonding through dishes such as the *Nabe Ryori,* a hot pot in which various vegetables and meat are boiled together and each person takes his/her share depending upon their interpersonal relations. This kind of sharing has continued even in fast food hubs like McDonald's, in which we see the process 'glocalisation' in action. They have *'Japanized'* their table manners even when eating a burger. Traphagan & Brown (2002) describe an incident in which a mother, daughter and son share a burger. The son took a big bite of his mother's and little sister's burgers but neither of them objected his behaviour. Sharing drinks and shakes among family members using a common straw is also a common sight. The continuing practice of the family meal in countries such as India and Japan highlight how family and community are regarded as central to Asian cultures as opposed to more individualistic societies of the West.

A final consideration is the fusion of technology with dining etiquette. Watching television while eating in households or playing music can be widely seen in restaurants. With the widespread use of social media, 'foodstagramming' is evolving into a new ritual as it has become the new and popular way to socialize on the internet. As the saying goes '*You are what you eat*', there is a constant effort to establish identity through the food posted on social media. In this context, social media also acts as a tool for change through the diffusion of dining practices. Not only do people share the way in which food from different cuisines are prepared, but also bring their culture-specific dining practices to the global forefront. Food cultures are consolidated over time with knowledge from our ancestors that is often a function of their experiences. Living in a scientific age, we are prompted to retrospect and reason our food practices and habits. Thus, there is a tendency to retain those dining practices that have scientific-backing. Today, the pace of change is so rapid that these traditional dining practices are rarely passed on to future generations and risk disappearing from our food and cultural landscape. When traders, explorers, etc., share their food and food cultures with locals, some manners are accepted, thus selectively replacing some traditional ones. This may be out of one's convenience or in an attempt to elevate one's social status by adopting 'superior' dining etiquette. Yet, these different traditions help showcase the diversity in our food cultures and it could prove very useful to document and preserve these knowledge-based, and often scientific dining practices.

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THE MAHAPRASAD OF PURI

Authored by: Swati Anwesha
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Abstract: *Before dismissing old practices as backward or superstitious, it is important to understand its logical relevance. This article elucidates the mysteries surrounding the preparation and consumption of the Mahaprasad at Jagannath Puri; a peculiar food culture that has survived for centuries without a hint of change in its ingredients or styles of cooking.*

'The lord belongs to all and no one' is the transcendental philosophy of Lord Jagannath and his followers. In the Rig Veda, it is mentioned that wood worship existed in the pre-Vedic period. The wood was the first deity to be worshipped, possibly because of its wide-scale utility. As believed in the *Sanatan Dharma*, the soul (Aatma) transfers to another body when its host dies. Similarly, once every 12-15 years, the Lord leaves his old body and his heart is transferred to a new body during the festival of *Nabakalevar* (New Embodiment). Lord Jagannath, the only deity made of wood, is the physical form given to an element like wood so that he can be worshipped as a physical being. The Jagannath culture is a synthesis of tribal, Aryan, Non-Aryan thought, belief and worship, inclusive of the essence of Buddhism, Jainism, and other world religions. Of the four Dhams, according to the Hindu religion, Puri is known as the 'Bhojana Kshetra'. It is believed that Lord Vishnu takes his bath at Rameshwaram (Karma Kshetra), dresses up and relaxes at Dwarka (Aishwarya Kshetra), eats at Puri (Bhojana Kshetra) and sleeps at Badrinath (Sayan Kshetra). This is possibly the reason why only the prashad served at Puri Jagannath is known as the 'Mahaprasad', the prefix 'Maha' connoting the greatness of the prasad.

The idea of introducing the Mahaprasad was the suggestion of the Adi-Sankaracharya (known as the father of modern day Hinduism) to the King of Puri, Jajati Keshari for the convenience of the devotees who travel from far and wide to express their devotion to the Lord. This happened back in the 8th century C.E. The menu of the kitchen has been changed as and when new rulers ascended the throne according to their preferences. Currently, there are 56 varieties of food prepared and offered at six different times of the day. This is on a regular day of the year. On festivals and occasions, special dishes are made as required. However, the method of preparation has not seen any changes. In general, the food that is prepared, can be classified as perishable and non-perishable. The idea of having non-perishable items or the 'Sukha' prasad is carried forward from the days when people had to walk for several days to reach Puri and get darshan. They could carry this food back for their families and neighbours. This prasad also compensated as their food for the return journey. Rice is considered as a perishable item, but a special kind of rice is prepared as a non-perishable item, called *Nirmalya*. This is cooked on a different hearth and has a drying area (*Nirmalya Mandap*), after which it is packed. The temple kitchen consists of 240 hearths where a meal for about one lakh people can be prepared at one go. The earthen pots, which are used for cooking, are half-baked and are still red in colour, so that, it can withstand high temperatures which a fully baked pot might not. The pots are made from laterite soil, which is abundantly available in the eastern region. The uniqueness of these pots is that the base of each pot has a half lotus or a chakra (the symbol of the Lord) engraved in it. Thus, the Mahaprasad is, in every way, a locally sustaining system.

Abiding by the tradition, the fire in this kitchen never goes out. Entrance into this kitchen is prohibited to everyone except the ones who prepare the meal, and those who are involved in the cooking must keep their nose and mouth covered at all times. Even getting a sniff of the food, before it is offered to God, is considered sinful. Since the Vedic periods, a caste-based division of labour has prevailed in this country. On similar lines, the *Supkaras* (cooks), like every other system in this temple is an inherited occupation. Generation after generation, they work in this kitchen, without making any change in cooking methods. Each job has a certain amount of people looking after it, and no one is allowed to interfere in the work of someone else. For example, a person in-charge of the rice cannot check the curry hearths or go and help in the area where the spices are ground. It is a distinctive way of working. The job and the recipes are kept within the family, and the younger generation is expected to carry it forward without any changes. However, today, the power imbibed in these families are being exploited by its members. Priests and other temple workers have taken to cheating, bribery, and exploitation.

Another old and repressive custom being followed is gender inequality. Never has a woman entered the kitchens where the Mahaprasad is being cooked. Women have always been considered weak, so although they are expected to work in kitchens, it cannot be that of the Lord. Additionally, women cannot work while menstruating since it is considered ‘unclean’, which would result in a loss of labour. The irony of this entire arrangement is that Goddess Lakshmi is the patron of food and cooking.

The only other person who can enter the kitchen apart from the supkaras is the Dhobapakhalia or the cleaner. Every morning, he is the first one to enter the kitchen and clean it. The cleaning has to be done in such a way that not a single grain of food from the previous day should be left behind or else the entire meal has to be re-cooked. Though many would argue that this results in excessive wastage of food, the situation does not arise as much. This practice started years ago when there was an abundance of food and people never had a fear of deprivation. Today, this practice seems baseless and unreasonable in a country like ours, where thousands go to sleep hungry and a world where people are dying of hunger. Despite knowing this, the devotees are blinded by their faith and refuse to part from their beliefs, in fear of the God. After the cleaning, the kitchen and the hearths are worshipped, in the name of Goddess Lakshmi, who also happens to be the wife of Lord Jagannath. Today, there are 75 types of unpaid workers in the temple whose only wage is the prasad. They are paid money only twice annually during festivals.

The Mahaprasad cannot be served by spoons, i.e. it has to be served by hands, nor can it be eaten sitting on a chair or table since it is considered disrespectful to God. Instead, people sit on the floor, eating with their hands from banana leaves. Moreover, no dish cooked in this temple uses ‘foreign vegetables’ like potato, tomato, brinjal, lady’s finger/okra, etc. which are considered as exotic and non-indigenous. Tomatoes and potatoes were introduced to India by the Portuguese in the 16th and early 17th century, and reached the eastern coast much later. Similarly, the carrot from Persia, the okra from West Africa, the French bean from South America, the eggplant from South Africa and other such vegetables with origins overseas, are not utilised in the temple’s traditional cuisine. Thus, although we cannot imagine our personal cuisine without these vegetables today, the temple authorities and ardent devotees cannot let go of their traditional recipes. This refusal to use exotic vegetables in the prasad makes the Mahaprasad more indigenous.

With every truth, there are many myths associated. One of the myths about the Mahaprasad is the vision of the shadow of a dog, on the wall of the kitchen, if Goddess Lakshmi is displeased with the food. In this case, the food is buried, and preparations are started from scratch. The water used for the preparation of the food here is taken from two wells ‘Ganga’ and ‘Yamuna’, which have never once dried or run out of water. People believe that these wells are directly connected to the Holy river, Ganga. The Mahaprasad is also offered to someone to mark a bond, to begin a new relationship. People believe in its sacred nature and feel it auspicious to consume before venturing into new territory. It is also a long-standing belief that the food when taken from the kitchen to the sanctum sanctorum, has no fragrance. It is only after it has been offered to Lord Jagannath and Goddess Bimala that one gets to smell the heavenly aroma of the Mahaprasad.

Despite globalisation penetrating every nook and corner of the world, the temple of Puri Jagannath and its practices, including those related to the Mahaprasad continue to remain untouched. As mentioned earlier, only vegetables and ingredients of indigenous origin continue to be used and not so much so as the quantity of salt has changed over the years. Despite the easy availability of vegetables like tomatoes and potatoes, which have now become common household ingredients and are available at a lower price as compared to others, the temple kitchen steers clear of it. This reflects the bubble the temple has been kept in, to prevent any outside influence. The temple itself is the manifestation of the time that has stood still while the world around it has moved on. Its culture has been isolated from the fast-paced world and some backward practices, like exclusion of women from the kitchens and the practice of untouchability, still prevail. Consequently, this preserved culture has captured the eyes of many, countrymen and foreigners alike, and has given the local economy the upliftment it needed to showcase itself to the world. Tourism is a major source of sustenance and employment for the people of the small town of Puri, one they are quite enjoying now, as the exoticisation of the local culture never fails to attract less than several lakh people per month. Despite large scale shifts in the economy of Jagannath Puri, and that surrounding the Mahaprasad, the culture connotations that revolve around it seem oblivious to the changes, much as the reverence and faith of the visitors. Amongst numerous mysteries this temple holds, the culinary myths continue to intrigue historians and devotees alike.

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FOOD SNOBBERY

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Abstract: *In a world where one is overstimulated with social media and one is constantly trying to reach new standards of being 'elite' and 'snobs', can a slow and mindful relationship with food be sustained? Here is a look into the worlds and intersections of food snobbery, food media and sustainable food.*

Humans often have a constant desire to better what they have, to take something simple and make it elegant, pompous, complex, sometimes for better and sometimes for worse. We have done the same for food; we took a simple basic need and persisted in our efforts to make it better. These efforts however, take away from (or may add to, and ultimately bring change in) the substance itself. We are not only consuming the food but we are also consumers of the complex influences, both political and social, which have led us to choose that food. A food snob, someone who claims to have a refined palate and a unique taste, is no exception to this fact. The history of food snobs is buried in America's relationship with food. Originally borrowed from the French in the post-world war II era, the extravagant culture of food snobbery has now transformed into a more local, sustainable and organic one. Food Snobs now care not only about the taste of their food but also where it came from, how responsibly it was produced and what impact that production may have had on the society as a whole.

Before French influence, America was famously called a "meat-and-potatoes" kind of place. Meat was important and sometimes complemented with only a small amount of low quality vegetables. In this context, therefore, quantity was revered over quality. Several foreign visitors were shocked at this practice: Charles Dickens declared that Americans ate "piles of indigestible matter." The historian Harvey Levenstein, in a study of early-American dietary habits, notes that "the enormous amounts of meat and starch and the short shrift given to fresh fruits and vegetables made constipation the national curse..." (Kamp, 2006, p. 51).

However, the social and economic conditions during and after Second World War opened America's borders to foreign influence. Julia Child, who introduced America to French cooking, had the freedom to explore the cuisine due to her wealth, and a platform in America to share her findings. In the post-war era, the strength of the American dollar as compared to the weaker franc enabled Americans to afford travel to France to discover not only the French high cuisine but also France's casual, quaint bistros and *auberges* (inns) (Kamp, 2006). After opening itself up to high French cuisine, America witnessed the entry of other cuisines due to an influx of vast numbers of immigrants. Thus, through the introduction of not only French cuisine but also gourmet Italian and authentic Indian cuisine, America transformed into a multicultural landscape for food.

Changes in the world economy after the wars made America a superpower. It can be argued that due to these factors the upper class Americans found themselves in a position comfortable enough to treat food as a luxury. They chose to pay more for less because they received the satisfaction of being seen as a member of a higher, more refined class through their food choices.

This opportunity was and continues to be exploited by the middle class population in their pursuit of social climbing even today. We have reached a point where apart from food snobs, it is equally essential to recognize people who belong to the category of 'aspirational food snobs'. It is because of increasing population of these that elite dining places are adopting the concept of 'small is elegant' and sustaining in their pursuits (2017, Times Food). More people are willing to pay more for lesser food because minimalist is 'high culture'. The portions are tiny, made from quality ingredients, and immense attention is paid to the art of plating. While the idea of beautiful plating is always subjective, an eye for its appreciation is testimony of one's finer sensibilities of art and design, a sign of high culture by itself. Thus, the extravagant price they pay is not as much for the food, as much as it is for the experience of snobbery, for belonging to that club. It is ironic how this 'minimalist' behaviour is no less capitalist in its endeavour.

America's economically comfortable position not only gave it power to label food as high and low, its cultural capital gave it the licence to decide so for the rest of the world as well. How America got this privilege can be explained through world systems theory. According to this theory by Wallerstein, there are certain core countries rich in physical capital. They label certain countries as the 'periphery' using the language of economics and development, and then actively exploit their resources. While it is almost always the core that benefits, the periphery is ratified due to its association with and dependency on the core and thus the system is sustained. Although a dominantly economic theory, it precisely captures the reality of the food world. As the Bourdieusian theory has elaborated, there is complex interplay of economic, social and cultural capital which establishes and sustains 'superiority'. To illustrate, a traditional Indian sweet like Gulab Jamun becomes, 'Golden brown orbs surrounded with syrup and small surprises inside: a touch of white chocolate, a hint of Nutella, a smidge of honey, bits of almonds and pistachios' in a Michelin-star recognised restaurant like Punjab Grill. Thus, with the help of its cultural capital, the core is able to not only validate the authentic food of the periphery, but also add 'other' (exotic?) elements, making it more valuable than it was before.

Such hegemony through food is spread with the use of media. The plethora of food-related content being produced everyday (culinary shows, food blogging and photography) is creating an insatiable social appetite. With constant exposure to fetishized food content which comes from the west, food becomes a glorified, irresistible, and a created need. We aspire that creation, we sensationalise it so much, that is has been labelled as *food porn*. The term *gastro-porn* was first coined by Alexander Cockburn in 1977: "True gastro-porn heightens the excitement and also the sense of the unattainable by proffering coloured photographs of various completed recipes" (Mejova, Abbar & Haddadi, 2016). Pictures tagged as "food porn" on social media work on the same principle. These pictures, although accessible to a larger audience showcase food that is still inaccessible to them, leaving them in a constant state of desire and dissatisfaction while maintaining the hegemony of food that the west decides is trendy.

We also participate in this performance of snobbery by sharing our pictures. At fancy restaurants, we send out several signals about not only our taste but also our social standing, knowledge and worldliness. This attempt to engage in amateur food photography is not simply to share our experience, but also to make meaning and attempt to define our self (Herman, 2017). Moreover, other markers like captions, location markers, hashtags etc., which allow people to communicate in the language of food and become a part of popular culture. What, therefore, started under the alias of an art form has been ingeniously used by the West to operationalise their soft power: by restaurants, food chains and food brands to gain more profits, by the food snob to display his/her snobbery, and by the average person in their pursuit of food snobbery.

We assign not only social but also political value to food through snobbery. With the periphery's rising awareness of the core's neo-colonial strategies, there have been several movements to counter such practices, and food snobbery is no exception. One such movement is the Slow Food Movement which started in Italy. The movement works around the world to protect food biodiversity, builds links between producers and consumers, and raises awareness of some of the most pressing topics affecting our food system. In over two decades of history, the movement has evolved to embrace a comprehensive approach to food that recognizes the strong connections between plate, planet, people, politics and culture.

This can also be seen as snobbery where food is treated as more than just food. However such food snobs face backlash from others who claim that such people are too conscious of what they eat and food must remain food. It's another way to blame 'liberal elites' for lecturing 'normal people' on what to do. A vast majority of such critics includes fast food chains and their lovers. One of them being the president of the USA. Donald Trump, earlier this year, said he'd rather eat fast food because at least he "knows what's in it." This is a clever way of labelling a responsible way of consumption as "snooty" to dissuade people from following it. This way a larger majority can fall for the consumerism that benefits such firms.

The slow food movement has now spread to Asian countries as well as Africa. Thus the semi-periphery and the periphery are coming together to challenge the 'core'. By redefining food snobbery and reclaiming the identity of authentic local cuisine, the Slow Food Movement is playing its part in the rise of a True New World Order. Having knowledge about one's indigenous cuisine is gaining importance. Now, someone who knows all about authentic Indian cuisine, about its production and sustainability is given the same "reverence" as someone who knows all about French cuisine. This scenario only holds true because the West now considers Indian cuisine to be trendy food. Thus, the periphery may gain the power to define its own identity but the legitimacy for this still continues to come from the core.

Food has always been a symbol of sharing and solidarity, envy and avarice, decadence and depravity, pride and repugnance, and equally of commonality as well as of difference (Ibrahim, 2015). We live in a world where many of the inferences made about our socio economic status, political ideologies and aesthetics are through what, where and how we eat. In a world of food snobs, each competing for validation of his/her own 'aesthetic', are people who treat food for what it is, who enjoy food without any labels, now total misfits?

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NOT PITCHER PERFECT?
ALCOHOL PROHIBITION IN BIHAR AND ITS EFFECTS

Authored by: Anupamaa Nayak
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***Abstract**: This article will attempt to grasp the differing attitudes towards alcohol, how it navigates its meanings in the realm of the sacred, the profane and the legal while locating it in the context of present-day Bihar and manner in which the Prohibition has engaged with (and conveniently used) various discourses to explain its presence, vis-à-vis its effects and repercussions.*

The Bihar Excise Act, 2016

Bihar has been known as one of the most densely populated, poor and illiterate states in India with a very low per capita income and HDI value (Human Development Report, 2011). But what brought it to the forefront of the national news again was Nitish Kumar's second electoral campaign in 2015, along with its promise to completely ban alcohol by April of the next year. The Bihar Excise (Amendment) Act, 2016 prohibits the manufacturing, bottling, distribution, transportation, accumulation, possession, purchase, sale or consumption of any type of liquor, intoxicating substance including bhang and medicines with alcoholic substance (Vangala, 2017). Despite receiving backlash from the media and the Patna High Court ruling the ban to be "illegal, impractical and unconstitutional", it is still in order throughout Bihar and has had varying and curious impacts.

Whether it was in New York in the 1920s, or Bombay in the 1950s, prohibition has long been established a political tool for control, one that almost always fails. Although the consumption of alcohol generally operates within the purview of varied religious, social, cultural and geographic norms and regulations; the act of legally disallowing alcohol overrules them all, leaving little to no space for individual and communal agency to partake in its consumption. In India, alcohol prohibition has been in force in four states and one union territory– Gujarat, Nagaland, Kerala, Bihar and Lakshadweep respectively. There also exists a partial prohibition in the state of Manipur. Bihar, however, is the most recent addition to the list, and also has the most rigid and severe laws. The intense ramifications of this legal move, ranging from entire households to entire villages being arrested, seems to be having varied effects on different communities and matters of state. The Act has however, been amended more recently to reduce the severity of its consequences.

Alcohol has always been a hotly contested topic within society. It is often condemned by many religions as a bad habit or sin, while being inherent to the roles and practices of others. Major religions such as Islam and Jainism prohibit the consumption of alcohol, categorising that as harmful, violent and immoral as do many majoritarian sects of Hinduism. However, the lines between the sacred and profane are often blurred. The anomaly in Ujjain's Kala Bhairav temple where alcohol is offered to Lord Shiva as opposed to the conventional milk and oil, clearly illustrates this complexity. A series of studies (Bales, 1944; Lolli, 1956; Mangin, 1957; Snyder, 1958) have put dents in the common notion that drinking pathologies are most likely to be found where alcoholic beverages are most common. Bales (1944) for example, found that although most Jews drink, few drink heavily. He explained that since alcohol was involved in sacred symbolism among Jews, it was less likely to be abused in secular situations (Klausner, 1964). The sacred symbolism of alcohol and ceremonial drinking in a community, according to these studies, made it less likely to be abused than in cases of secularized consumption. However, there have been studies that have also shown a positive correlation between ceremonial drinking and alcoholism (Sayres, 1956). The religious character of alcohol is therefore suggested by its ambivalent relation to it – for not everything approached ambivalently is religious, but all of what is religious partakes of ambivalence (Klausner, 1964).

In the case of Bihar, this ambivalence towards alcohol consumption has led to a polarization. Alcohol was rejected on the basis of its profaneness (with severe measures) and this rejection was characterized as draconian and unconstitutional, also taking into account the possible economic consequences of the prohibition. One of the major concerns expressed in opposition to the prohibition thus, was the loss of revenue that the state derived from alcohol trade. A similar set of arguments have been employed, hereon, to gauge whether the new liquor law has been a success or a failure.

Of the Women and For the Women

The major support for the complete ban of alcohol came from numerous women's self-help groups across the state and the constituency of women voters who demanded that it be made a part of the state's larger political and constitutional agenda. Throngs of women marched in support of the Act, citing alcohol consumption as the main cause of their abuse, exploitation and economic underdevelopment.

There have been numerous newspaper reports (Daniyal, 2016; Anand, 2017; Goswami, 2017) that have quoted women expressing their gratitude to the CM for the effectiveness of new law in improving their lives. The complete ban on alcohol seems to have freed up resources (both monetary and physical) that these women are now reinvesting in food, education, health and agriculture. Incidents of domestic violence and abuse have also been rumoured to be on the down low. Women in the villages of Bandol, amongst many others, charged down with brooms on men who were attempting to make and buy liquor. There thus appears to be a shift in the power dynamic, a reclamation of authority – like with the Gulabi Gang in UP – with women taking action and this time, with legal reinforcement.

Whether consciously or unconsciously, the Bihar government did succeed in employing a feminist narrative to support the Excise Act. And to a large extent, it seems to have worked out for both the parties involved. Women have now come to be a vote bank, with a larger proportion of women voters in the state than men. However, like in the case of most laws and reforms aimed toward bringing about radical and drastic change, it is often the periphery (or in this case, the periphery of the periphery – the lower castes and other religious minorities) that experiences the most acute effects of its implementation.

Alcohol, Crime and the Criminal

The Act is applicable across the state to all its residents as well as tourists visiting, or even passing through the state. It applies to all sections of Bihar's population, including those who used to sustain their living by brewing 'desi daru', or country liquor – a majority of whom are categorized as SCs and STs. Unsurprisingly, the asymmetrical effects of this action can be seen and felt best on the marginalized minority who occupy the periphery.

Over 23 lakh litres of IMFL and country liquor have so far been seized and more than 90 percent of people arrested in liquor cases belong to Dalit, Mahadalit communities or poor families (Sharma, 2018). The incongruous effect of the prohibition is furthered highlighted in the cases of Alinagar and Kathol. The former is a tribal-dominated, Dalit and Muslim village that presents a prohibition success story where women who previously produced country-liquor, now produce dairy with the help of a local organisation 'Dugdha Vikash Samiti' and the government. The latter village, on the contrary, has witnessed vast unemployment and increased migration to Punjab in search of livelihood. Following multiple raids and arrests, most residents of Kathol were required to sell all their assets, including agricultural land and cattle, to pay bail and were left with no resources, forcing many to resort to seeking alms.

The act of criminalising the brewing, processing, sale and consumption of alcohol is situated in restricting access and availability. It also has to do with attaching a moral undercurrent to the behaviours and identity of those who choose to engage with it. What needs to be considered here, is who is imposing this morality, and whose morals it represents. The reasons for prohibition so far have been standard consistently throughout history. The overarching theme here has been the negative effect of alcohol on an individual's actions – predominantly unlawful and deviant in nature.

The correlation and causation between alcohol, crime and violence has been an abundantly researched subject matter, covering aspects of interpersonal, intrapersonal and communal acts of violence vis-à-vis drinking (Graham & Livingston, 2017; Weatherburn, 1990; Abbey et. al, 2001). While alcohol consumption has been an active variable in many of these studies, there is no conclusive evidence that confirms alcohol to be the causal factor for crime or that its removal from the equation will have an inverse effect on the incidence of criminal activities, especially to the extent that justifies its disallowance. Therefore, by enacting a prohibition, a singular narrative is legitimised, which more often than not has a political undertone.

Conclusion

It has been almost two years since the Bihar Excise Act was operationalized. There is a dearth of academic research on the socio-cultural and socio-political impacts of the same. We are yet to determine the long-term impacts of alcohol prohibition in Bihar.

Aristotle opined that "man, by nature is a political animal". The question thus arises, is alcohol also inherently political in nature? It is often contested that all art is political, that art cannot exist 'for art's sake'. Whether it is a stroke of colour on a blank canvas or a graffiti on a public wall, art operates on a spectrum of boundless intended, implied and understood meanings, between those who create and those who consume it. It has previously been established that alcohol occupies a multitude of spaces and has varied ritual and symbolic meanings. Like art, it is consumed by an individual or a community on several occasions, for various purposes in various manners. The 'art' of mixology, a celebratory glass of champagne, the ritual significance of *bhang* on *Holi*; all are evidence of the nuanced nature of alcohol, as well as the narratives that have been constructed around it. In that case then, is alcohol also inherently political in nature? If yes, then is prohibition just a tool that actualises the political essence of alcohol?

The fractioned and ambivalent nature of alcohol allows malleability to foster or negate an assertion, making it an easy (political) tool to exploit. In the case of Bihar, alcohol consumption was considered diabolical, and prohibition was the pro-feminist, highly moralistic route to redeem the people of its nefarious effects. The question however still remains, is it possible to have 'alcohol, for alcohol's sake?'

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TAXING FOOD:

FIGHT AGAINST GLOBAL OBESITY RATES

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Abstract: *Taxes and obesity are not often spoken about in the same sentence. The following paper tackles the issue of preventable obesity by virtue of taxing it, and the unforeseen effects it may have on individual freedom, socio-economic class structure and dietary preferences of the modern society shaped by advertisements.*

Introduction

Walk down the aisle of any food selling establishment, pick up a food item and there's a 60% chance it contains added sugar (Sanger-Katz, 2016). World Health Organization (WHO) notes that at least 2.8 million people die each year as a result of being overweight or obese, directly connecting the cause for the same to high sugar and fat-based diets. What's less clear is how to fight this epidemic. Scientific Community supported by research overwhelmingly supports government regulation and intervention in the form of taxes for food deemed 'unhealthy' (Nyugen & El-Serag, 2010). Under such taxes, 'non-essential' food products, or products that are deemed a health risk are charged an additional amount similar to alcohol and cigarettes in an effort to curb their sale and consumption. But fat and sugar taxes may prove to be more controversial; even though seven out of ten people consider fast food to be unhealthy, about eight out of ten people still indulge in it (Dugan, 2013) probably due to their affordability and accessibility. These taxes are thus, making a case for shifting food prices in ways to steer consumers towards healthier options.

Understanding Obesity

Biologically, obesity is defined when the storage of excess body fat causes negative effects on the body, usually when the BMI is 25 kg/m^2 and above. European Association for the Study of Obesity (EASO) notes obesity as the fifth leading cause of death in the world, killing more people than terror attacks, Alzheimer's and car crashes combined (Fig. 1). About 10% of the world's population is now obese constituting of about 603.7 million adults and 107.7 million children (The New England Journal of Medicine, 2017). The study notes that obesity rates have doubled in 70 major countries between 1980 and 2015. Socio-economically, obesity has other implications including higher healthcare costs, occupational discrimination, etc. It is strongly influenced by environmental and social factors such as poverty, housing conditions, and work situations.

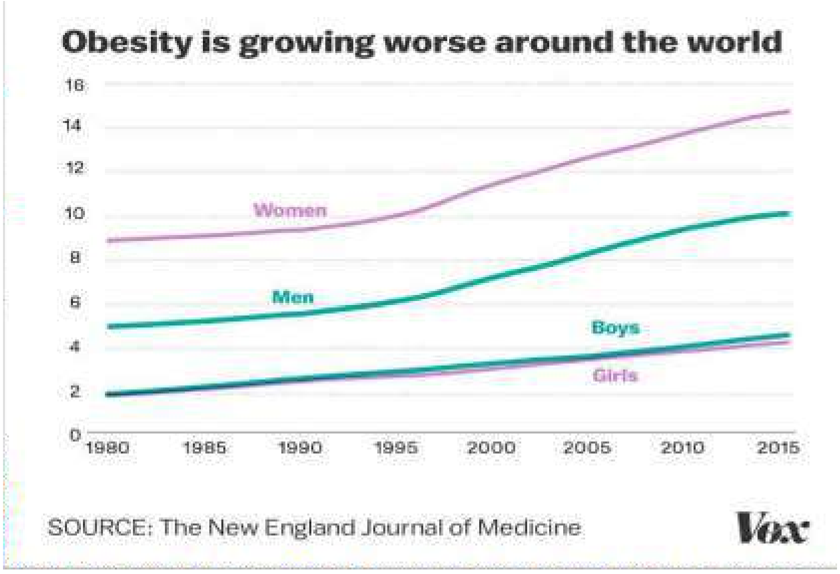

Fig. 1: European Association for the Study of Obesity, *Obesity Facts & Figures*, http://easo.org/education-portal/obesity-facts-figures

Numerous research papers showcase that compared to 1970s, we currently are eating less amount of food (by weight) on a daily basis, but this fails to explain the rise in obesity rates (DeSilver, 2016). One factor that has changed is the advent of fast food outlets and the perception that people have towards them. Such foods have become relatively cheaper and more accessible than healthier options such as fruits and vegetables. As human beings have started to put in more working hours, the drive through towards McDonald's, PepsiCo, Frito Lays, Pizza Hut etc. seems as a sociological change in what is perceived as a "meal". They have done this by effectively advertising the product making using of extravagant images, sales deals, product placements in influential media to promote trivial products (Jolly, 2011). Though easily accessible, these products are high in trans fats and sugars while being low in nutrients.

Coca-Cola and McDonald's have been heavily lobbied by sponsoring programs such as Olympics and Michelle Obama's 'Let's Go' Campaign. These campaigns encourage people to take part in more physical activities. But, according to the British Journal for Sports Medicine and numerous others, lack of physical activity and obesity is a busted myth with them stating, "You cannot outrun a bad diet." (Malhotra, Noakes & Phinney, 2015) Obesity is heavily based on the food intake of a person. This increase in influence of advertisements on humans for making choices regarding their food, health and other necessities can be blamed as one of the foremost reasons how fast food companies have managed to sell their products at higher quantities. Thus, these companies seem to showcase a faux sense of initiative towards the fight against obesity, while at the same time promoting their sugar-rich products.

'We are simply eating more calories'

Pew Research Centre notes 'that the average caloric intake has risen from 2,109 calories in 1970 to 2,568 calories.' Hence, even though the quantity of food eaten has lowered, the number of calories such as saturated fats and chemically processed ingredients contained in them is much higher. This is not helped by the ever-increasing cost of healthy food such as vegetables and fruits. One of the reasons is that the government does not subsidize fruits and vegetables in the same way they subsidize food crops such as wheat, corn, soybean etc. due to their functionality as food crops. These same crops end up in products such as high fructose corn syrup or soybean oil used in the preparation of the so-called 'junk food.' The same study notes that to get the same number of calories as eating one doughnut a person has to consume three apples which are obviously more expensive. Another reason noted for our high intake of calories is an effective marketing strategy employed by the food industry. Reports have noted a positive correlation between increased advertising for unhealthy products and the rising child obesity rates as stated earlier (McGinnis et al., 2006).

'So, what actually works for weight loss?'

The foremost research done in the field of weight loss is by the National Weight Control Registry of the United States. The program works by following the habits, traits, and duration of the weight loss for people who have lost more than 13.61 kgs and kept it off for a year (Belluz & Zarracina, 2018) (Fig. 2). These questionnaires were tabulated and it was found that the people who managed to lose weight were the ones who exercised regularly, restricted their diet, stayed away from a high-calorie intake and weighed themselves at least once a week.

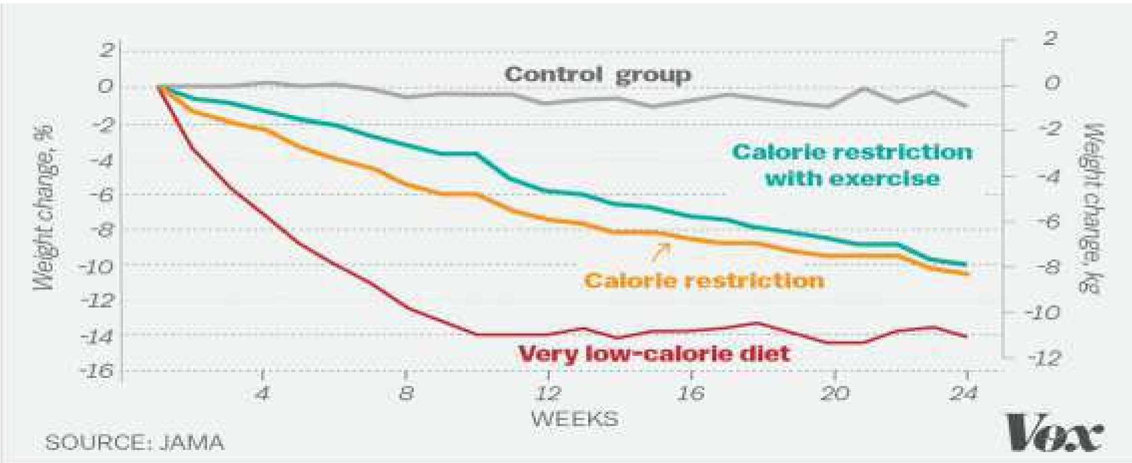

Fig. 2: Julia Belluz, *Why you shouldn't exercise to lose weight?* Oct 31, 2017, https://www.vox.com/2016/4/28/11518804/weight-loss-exercise-myth-burn-calories

The best results were shown by people who cut down on a high-calorie diet. These people restricted their diet and cut down on portions. They ate healthier home-made food and avoided any food containing processed ingredients and trans fats (Heilbronn et al., 2006).

As seen, consumption of calories is instrumental for weight growth. Correlating to the research stating obesity is a growing epidemic in middle and lower classes, one can infer that these high-calorie diets are relied upon for subsistence due their affordability rather than the fast food/ on-the-go food that they are meant to be. This shows the great divide in the already fractured social structure. Though, research done by Tufts University tells us that one of the best ways to fight such a crisis is to impose a nationwide tax on high-calorie food products, wouldn't this also make it harder for the poor to put food on their table? This is because such taxes are aimed at reducing the consumption of the targeted food products on two fronts, either by taxing it heavily or by increasing its cost of production. Though these laws worked on cigarettes, alcohol and gambling, it's important to note that these were non-essential products. Ethics too come into the picture in the convoluted argument of taxing food that people lower of the income scale depend upon. So, before the imposition of such taxes, one needs to look into other things that can be done to counterweight their effects. These can include making nutrient-rich products such as vegetables, fruits, meats etc. cheaper by subsidizing them instead of just grains and oils. This should, in theory, push people towards healthier options, without adversely affecting the people belonging to the lower economic strata as fat taxes do. National Health Service of the United Kingdom notes that such a program is more effective in reducing obesity than taxes but such a program has not yet been tested on a large scale, so results are inconclusive. But, a social experiment such as this would surely help middle-lower class the ease of access to healthy food.

How are countries fighting obesity today?

About 12 countries with medium and high-level GDP have taken the initiative of fighting obesity through various taxes and laws. Hungary has been the most successful in enforcing a 'junk-food' tax that has shown a positive effect on its citizens. Since 2011, the country makes its manufacturers pay a 'value added' tax of 27% over and above the already existing 25% imposed on most food. These taxes are based on the content of sugar and salt in food products (Weintraub, 2018). Based on a study conducted by Hungary's National Institute of Pharmacy and Nutrition and the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2015, these taxes have shown great success as more than 59% of the citizens have lowered their consumption of non-essential food products. The WHO study also showed that overweight or obese adults are "twice as likely to change their eating habits than were people of normal weight."

Mexico is another country that started taxing food products in 2013. These taxes, unlike Hungary, apply to specific products used in manufacturing such as butter, sugar, cereal-based products (corn syrup). The results for Mexico are skewed towards the middle and lower class as 5.1% drop in the consumption of taxed products, while it has little effect on those higher on the economic class, where a third of the obese Mexican population exist (Belluz, 2018). Numerous other countries have followed 'food tax' including Japan, Chile, France, Australia, New Zealand, multiple states in USA and Kerala in India.

'But, why should the government care about obesity?'

In India, obesity accounts for 7% of total healthcare cost, a preventable burden on the country's already fractured healthcare system. Obese people are also at a higher risk of having high blood pressure, diabetes, heart diseases, sleep apnea, respiratory problems and cancer (Stanford Health Care, 2015). In times of business-friendly governments and their policies, fat and sugar tax often seem difficult to enforce as they overpower health issues. This is due to heavy lobbying by companies to curb such laws. These laws also seem to go against the rights of people with the government trying to control every aspect of an individual's life, especially when the distrust between citizens and government seems to be at an all-time high. But, when capitalistic/ free market policies create a harmful effect on the livelihood of people and are detrimental to their well-being, government forces need to step in to control such an epidemic. These regulations are necessitated for the benefit of the population as a whole. These policies are aimed at creating a social and environmental change in the life choices of people moving them towards a safer option.

Conclusion

World Health Organization considers obesity to be the second leading preventable cause of death, behind tobacco usage. Government's taxation of food product for the benefits of the citizens is a closely studied topic in numerous papers and despite the failure of the Danish 'fat tax', other taxes seem to be working with close monitoring from the governmental agencies. But, taxing the product can't be the only part of this solution to the epidemic in the supply-demand model. The government needs to also start providing subsidies to people for easy access to nutrition rich food. These initiatives would help decrease obesity among the lower and middle-income individuals as they are the ones most affected by it. Such regulations would also take time to show their effectiveness and may face a backlash from consumers and business-owners, but need to be strived through for the betterment of the masses.

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ARE GM FOODS THE SOLUTION TO WORLD HUNGER?

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Edited by: Bhuvan Majmudar

Abstract: *Golden rice, BT soya bean, and other varieties of BT crops are recent discoveries of the last 2 decades. These are what are known as 'Genetically Modified Crops' that have a manipulated DNA giving them new properties, which make them advantageous over the original crops. Unfortunately, these have a host of negative effects over consumption patterns, the economy, the environment, and the human health in the long run. This article traces the emergence as well as the cost-benefit analysis of GMOs.*

With an ever growing population of 7 billion, climate change, and land shortage, it is very easy to call genetic engineered food a philanthropic wonder, propagated for the 'good of mankind'. Its discovery might have been for the benefits it gives over wild type crops (those found indigenously in nature) such as better yield or faster growth, but over the last few decades, it has succumbed to the test of capitalism. Are Genetically Modified (GM) foods still sold for the universal benefits they could have, or to perpetuate the capitalist institution? Can we further argue that advancements in technology could feed the hungry, and science could put an end to world hunger?

Artificial selection of plants has been around since 10,000 years. A lot of modern -day crops such as corn and sweet potato were artificially bred to select for beneficial traits. The GMOs (genetically modified organisms) that we know of today were only discovered in the late 20th century after progress in genetics research. Genetic recombinant technology and plant tissue culture are the basis of GM crops. Genetic recombinant technology means that one cell of a plant, which is to be modified is taken and DNA which encodes for the necessary property is inserted into the cell. For instance 'Bt' crops are made by inserting DNA that makes the protein 'Bt', which is not generally found in plants. This protein is toxic for certain insects and thus makes the crops resistant to them. To make a fully grown plant from a single cell, the modified cells are grown in an artificial medium called 'plant tissue culture', and is then transferred into the soil. The first plant to be officially approved and sold in the United States commercially was 'GE Tomato' in 1994. It was sold for its delayed ripening ability by Calgene, a biotechnology giant. With rapid patenting and acquisition of smaller seed companies, more than half of the world's seed supply is owned by four companies, implying that the entire GM food supply of the world is in control of a few powerful individuals. Currently, there is a wide variety of GM crops such as the 'Bt' variety (for its pest resistance), Golden rice (for its additional nutrients), Drought resistant maize, and several others. Despite multiple disadvantages, the possibilities of GM crops are endless, and maximising this technology could help in mitigating the problem of food shortage around the world.

World hunger implies the limited or unreliable access to foods that are safe and nutritionally adequate, to a level that is life-threatening (National Research Council, 2006). 10.7% of the global population suffers from chronic hunger, especially people belonging to underdeveloped and developing countries. The issue of world hunger is not as directly linked to food shortage as it is to the capitalisation of food and its unequal distribution amongst the population.

In a hypothetical condition when all factors for the growth of a plant are ideal, the plant shows ‘maximum yield’. Due to changes in environmental factors such as temperature, water conditions, salinity, pest, weeds, the plants show its ‘actual yield’. One of the reasons GM Plants were invented was to bridge this gap between the ideal and actual yield. Some GMOs have herbicide resistance for better growth when in competition with weeds, some have resistance to insects, viruses or bacterial infections, while some newer varieties even have higher abiotic stress tolerance (the ability to tolerate conditions such as drought, flooding, high or low temperature or salinity). Another advantage that comes with herbicide or pesticide resistant crops is that a lesser amount of pesticide is used, which proves to be economical to farmers. Insect resistant varieties such as the ‘Bt’ variety requires minimal use of pesticides or insecticides, giving the plants (and the consumers of the product) zero exposure to chemicals, which could otherwise be toxic. Genetic Recombination technology has also been used to increase nutrients produced by plant products. Golden rice is a classic example, which was invented and sold to tackle the deficiency of Vitamin A in Southeast Asian countries. Biofortification (increasing nutritional contents of food crops) is where GM technology is headed. With a substantial possibility to tackle world hunger, is GM technology working towards where it should be?

Due to rapid growth, a short lifespan, and a high number of offspring, insects, weeds, other small pests, bacteria, and viruses rapidly adapt and become resistant to the chemicals used against them. This problem has started emerging with GM crops, too. There have been instances of resistant pests, which now possess the capability to destroy crops and decrease their yield. With all crops in a field being genetically identical, even if one organism becomes resistant, huge losses can occur. Environmental concerns regarding GM are one of the reasons why they are banned in the European Union. Introduction of artificial elements in nature, or changing the natural order of things, or in more scientific terms ‘artificially changing the course of evolution’ are some of the main arguments pitted against the use of GM Crops. Although these concerns may seem dangerous and threatening, their effects will be seen only decades later.

Similarly, the impacts of GM Crops on human health is something that can be witnessed only after several years. Unfortunately, even biofortification has not shown conclusive results. FDA (Food and Drug Association) stated that the GM golden rice did not contain a significantly different amount of Vitamin A when compared to regular rice after s torage. The additional vitamin A produced in the golden rice degrades quickly after harvest. Hence, the rice reaching customers or even when consumed by farmers after storage does not have a significantly different percentage of vitamin A as compared to it s wild type relative, which was the original goal of this GM plant. However, it is important to note that food security not only consists of food availability and the nutrition derived from it but also the accessibility to food (both, economic resources to buy it and its availability). There has always been an unfair distribution of food between developing and developed countries. A tremendous amount of food wastage takes place in the US and Europe due to which the imported food from developing nations goes to waste. Fair and equal distribution of food is the solution which will not be achieved even if a large part of the food crops are GM. Increasing global climate change effects are also seen in the food industry where local availability of food is decreasing due to unpredictable weather.

Even if GM crops are grown and made available, there needs to be a market for it; it should be sustainable and profitable to farmers, and be distributed in areas that do not have access to them. Opinions about GM technology in food varies according to development and laws of that particular region. Developing countries in Asia and South America do not have any restrictions on GM food crops, whereas the EU has a large number of restrictions on imports and labelling of food products containing recombinant DNA technology. Patented GM seeds although increase yield, cannot be reused by farmers due to Intellectual Property Rights concerns. Hence, it is not a very economical method for small scale farmers, since they have to invest in new batches of seeds after each harvest. This also goes against the traditional method of Indian farming (to sow seeds from their previous harvest). This has caused many Indian cotton farmers to go into debt since Monsanto Bt cotton has monopolised the market. Wastage and inefficient food distribution contribute to the majority of world hunger. 44% of harvested crop dry matter is lost before consumption (Alexander, et al., 2017), which tells us the magnitude of losses. These are both on the agricultural as well as the consumer level. The problem of food security cannot be solved easily with technological advancements alone. GM crops may be helpful, but their cost overpowers the benefits. Even if GM technology were perfected and implemented worldwide, the problem of world hunger would not be mitigated since it is so deeply rooted in the economic gap.

The food and agriculture organisation (FAO) of the United Nations defines world hunger in terms of people who are malnourished. While malnutrition is directly linked to hunger in some cases, in the urban sense of malnutrition, people may still have access to food but healthy options might be more expensive and out of their economic reach. Even if remote places in developing countries grow their own food, they might not have all the necessary nutrient content. This is due to poor distribution and even the economic level of the individuals. Unfortunately, the definitions of malnourishment are established by a western understanding of development, and the actual social reality may be starkly different. Policy makers in developing countries should not look at the UN or global standards, but at the local ground truth.

According to FAO, 1.3 billion ton of all food in the world is wasted, which if distributed correctly, could be used to end world hunger about four times. This means, to end world hunger, it is not necessary to increase the yield from crops, in fact, the pressure on the agricultural industry can be decreased. As individuals, we all should partake in conscious consumption of food. Making sure food wastage does not occur not only at a domestic level is one step, but governments should make sure it does not occur during the farm-to-consumer level. Losses due to throwing away of food that does not look 'perfect' is the main reason why a large amount of produce does not reach the shelf. Countries of the EU have taken steps against this by selling 'imperfect' looking food in their supermarkets. In theory, therefore, GMOs are not an extreme necessity to solve the problem as discussed above. While they might be useful for increasing yield in the future with drastic climate change, their unknown effects on environment and health are too significant a risk to take.

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**TECHNOLOGY IN THE DEVELOPMENT SECTOR:
A study on technological tools adopted by India for Corporate Social Responsibility**

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Abstract: *This research paper focus on how The Companies Act of 2013 has led to an increased use of technology in the development sector and thus creating an increased efficiency among all stakeholders.*

Our reality of India's social sector has changed to a broader term 'Development Sector'. The term 'sector' is used because it is a large generic segment of the economy. Previously looked at as charity and a philanthropic space confined to NGOs, it now encompasses all actors - NGOs, social and corporate foundations, social enterprises, support organisations, government organisations, and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Not only does it focus on social issues, but also involves private sector to implement concrete solutions.

The total CSR spending by top 500 companies from 2014 to March 2019 is likely to cross Rs. 50,000 crore. In order to understand how and where this money is being spent, we need to first understand the sector.

Period	Type of philanthropy
Pre-industrial to 1850	Merchants
Late 1800's	Birla, Tata, Modi, Godrej, Bajaj, Singhania and Mahindra's
Indian freedom struggle	Trusteeship
1960-1980	Public Sector Undertakings (PSU)
Post 1980's	Integrated sustainable business strategies
1991	India became globalised economy
2011	Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) released National Voluntary Guidelines (NVG's)
2013	Companies Act, 2013

CSR has both primary and secondary stakeholders. Primary stakeholders include Corporates, NGOs, Intermediaries, Government and Beneficiary. The secondary stakeholders are online knowledge resource portals and online news platforms.

Please Note: *Two NGOs – Antarang and SNEHA were interviewed to understand their use of technology.*

<u>SNEHA</u> *(Society for Nutrition Education and Health Action) is a non-profit organisation that works with women, children, public health and safety systems. Their focus areas are maternal and new born health, child health and nutrition,*

empowerment, health and sexuality among adolescents and prevention of violence against women and children

Antarang is a non-profit organisation that focuses on youth skill development and making students from underprivileged background ready for the job market through their programs 'CareerAware' and 'CareeReady'.

Analysis

NGO:

Limitations: There is always a trade-off between the cost and functionality a system provides. While looking for cost effective solutions, NGOs have to tweak their processes to make the system work. Another limitation is that open source and free software's require technical skills for end users which is not feasible in development sector. There is therefore a sharp learning curve for end users. Most of the NGOs have web applications but not a specific mobile application as it is expensive, difficult to maintain and it needs technical skills.

Criteria for new technology: NGOs look at cost, scalability and data security while searching for new technology. They do a reference check to understand how the technology solves real life problems for other NGOs. They also look for how much customization is required in the available software and if there are off the shelf solutions giving them the same functionality.

Users view point:

a. SNEHA:

The community organisers and volunteers in the slums of Mankhurd, Mumbai have become familiar with apps like Tableau and CommCare. They take up regular meetings with the people and self-initiate decisions. They feel empowered and a sense of responsibility as they get to raise awareness among the people. Till date there have only been women volunteers and organisers but in 2018 men started to volunteer and speak about issues like malnutrition and family planning. This shows that people are open to change and technological advancement.

b. Antarang:

Since majority of the youth are technologically aware due to use of their mobile phones, the use of tablets in CareeReady helps them to learn faster and better. Antarang has 450 tablets for the students of CareeReady. They learn how to use different tools within the tablet which prepares them for their roles after employment. Many students are employed within Antarang itself and they help think of innovative ways to build efficiency of the organisation.

Intermediary Organisations:

The Intermediary organisations included in this paper are 'Project Heena' and 'Samhita'. Their common goal is to link Corporates with NGOs and provide CSR activities. They scan through the credentials of an NGO and verify them. They help corporates with formulating their CSR strategies, policy, design and implementation. They provide Employee engagement programs, employee giving, donation and fundraising platforms to corporates and NGOs. A Corporate can decide if they want to give their entire CSR handling to an intermediary or take them in for consultation. Organizations such as Digital Empowerment Foundation and Drishtant are technology based and help non-profits to digitalise their operations

.

Online Knowledge Resource Portals:

Organisations like KPMG and PwC provide research publications, articles and journals on varied topics in the development sector as part of their research department. This organisation is not solely dedicated to publishing information. Bridgespan, SSIR and IDR are organisations dedicated solely to publishing knowledge resources. Yet, access to the complete archive is possible only after membership.

The articles are both written and read by employees and leaders who are part of this sector. They are not popularised among the masses. The preferred and most used language of communication is English. This shows power and privilege among the creators and users of these facilities. Only organisations from the sector have the privilege to read and access the information provided. As all the content is provided in English, the mass population in India won't be able to interpret it.

Online News Platforms:

Their foundation is based on technology. These online news platforms are websites and do not have mobile applications. The CSR Journal, CSR Live and India CSR provide their content in English. The CSR Journal and India CSR both provide their content also in Hindi and India CSR is the only organisation that provides its content in a local language Marathi. Here, the masses can engage in reading of content and access information. Content available on all three platforms are free.

Quantity vs. Quality debate:

A Corporate has to spend its total CSR fund in the same financial year. Hence, while interviewing an NGO for grant allocation they look at the number of beneficiaries they can impact. They are more interested to know about the organisational overview of the NGO: from discussion on the background of the trustee board and management team, to the organisation's financial sustainability, to risk management processes, human resource management process, impact management and other management details. They then have a short discussion about on-ground work.

The issue arises due to weak paperwork among majority of the NGOs as they lack in managerial skills. Small-scale NGOs don't have the finances to systematise their organisation. This point becomes prominent in the rural areas of India. Due to lack of access to resources like technology and language barrier, rural NGOs face a disadvantage and lose out on funds. This behaviour shown by the corporate makes the NGOs second guess the necessity for such a mandate. The pressure put onto an NGO to perform and reach a particular target of beneficiaries in a way hampers the quality of service provided to the beneficiary.

Recommendations

Corporates:

1) To invest in small scale NGOs that have a strong grass-root network and help them with capacity building and technical expertise.
2) Make employees from the company help NGOs with technical expertise and improve operations efficiency.
3) Involve more Information Technology (IT) companies while granting CSR to an NGO as they can help with creating innovative technology.
4) In order to prevent corporates from spending their CSR money on inhouse purposes, they should upload their annual CSR expenditure online so as to create transparency.

NGOs:

1) NGOs should be more open about embracing new technologies which otherwise is a huge barrier. Increasingly funders and partners are willing to spend on technology rather than overhead costs or HR costs. This makes technology solutions even more important.
2) NGOs must start systematically investing in technology and specialised workers with technical skills.
3) NGOs can try Track your Metrics, an Indian software, for data collection, presentation and analysis. Track your Metrics helps simplify data collection and survey by providing options for local languages.
4) Software's like Domo, Looker, Birst , Qlik, Sisense, MicroStrategy, Alteryx and Global me are data analytics software's that will help the organizations give accurate assessments based on their needs.
5) Since NGOs widely use cheque, cash and transfer for fundraising and donations, they can explore digital methods for fundraising. Like Antarang uses CitiusTech gateway, they can try danamojo, Paytm, Paypal and Rupay.

For Intermediaries:

1) To make technology more cost effective and less complex so that small scale NGOs can adopt them.
2) To help bridge the gap between numbers and quality of impact on the beneficiary.
3) To try and remove dummy NGOs from the sector through the verification process of different NGOs.

For Online Knowledge Resource Portals:

1) Since Indian Development Review is originally an Indian organisation, they should provide their content in Hindi and other local languages too.

2) They must promote these sites among the masses so that the people can provide their suggestions through these portals.

For Online News Platforms:

1) To provide their content not only in English but also in Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati and other local languages.
2) To provide mobile applications for their platform so that more people can access it.

Key conclusions:

a) Technology has improved efficiencies for all stakeholders and connected different actors in the sector.
b) New industries have spawned due to the mandatory nature of CSR, most of which are using technology to deliver services e.g. mobile phone apps, social media consultants, low cost education and medical devices.
c) Technology has been used to enhance research and gain a deeper understanding of this sector e.g. research studies being conducted by SNEHA to understand urban health issues.

While use of technology has increased efficiencies and lowered costs for the sector, it has also played a role in empowering the users, especially those at the base of the pyramid. However we need to be conscious of the risk that technology cannot solve the underlying social issues, they are only a means to improve effectiveness of the sector.

The development sector is no longer looked at as a philanthropic space of charity and empathy. It has been six years since the Companies Act of 2013 was initiated. The involvement of the private sector has helped the sector to gain a stature in society. The creation of new avenues has opened up a new job market for the youth. Employment and investment rates in this sector is high. Yet, as it is a sector which is highly dependent on socio-economic factors, the results or benefits of the mandate will be visible only in the long term.

If the involvement of the private sector has truly been beneficial or just a quantitative strategy will be unfolded in the due course of time.

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CONCEPTION OF MEMES AND EMERGING SUB-CULTURES

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Abstract: *The objective of this paper is to identify, evaluate and understand the effects of 'meme culture' in society. We try to understand how memes that are inherently diverse, opinionated and subjective can be institutionalized under the concept of 'culture'. The idea is to deconstruct the viability of the meme culture; the perception of them being 'universal' and the role they play in the creation of an alternative reality.*

Introduction

In reality 2.0, memes need no introduction. If you have been (lucky?) enough to have dodged this reality for roughly a decade, 'memes' can be defined as any piece of media, including but not restricted to text, image, giphy, video or vine that conveys an idea. This concept is interdisciplinary in nature – it can be political, economic, social, or interpersonal. Contrary to popular opinion, memes weren't originally the brainchild of the internet. Richard Dawkins, an evolutionary biologist postulated 'memes' in 1976 and defined them as:

> information units which produce copies of themselves in order to be transmitted from generation to generation; and evolution can be understood as directed by those replicators in order to preserve their continuity (Alvarez, 2004, p. 1).

Dawkins' definition that looks at memes as being transmitters of cultural traits through generations suggests that the transmission of cultural traits would more or less occur over a substantial span of time and within a 'single' structured society or multiple similarly structured societies (Alvarez, 2004). The internet, however, provides a space for memes to replicate, proliferate and duplicate beyond their physical and cultural boundaries.

While Dawkins assumed that meme-transmission was evolutionary and hereditary, the internet has turned it into a technologically driven cultural phenomenon 'in itself'. The characteristic feature of this particular meme culture is that its ideas are created, shared, popularized and made viral within a span of minutes. Hence, there has been a notable shift in Dawkins' understanding of memes and memes as we see today.

So, a postmodern acceptance of the internet as the new enabler of meme-transmission compels us to look at what memes mean in that context. To begin with, the most important feature of a meme is that its construction is elementary. A badly edited image or a screenshot of a text box, the universality of accessing memes comes from its rudimentary construction. A meme is almost never excessively detailed, jargon-based or intricately created, unless either of the aforementioned features contributes to its interpretation. Memes in most cases are a reproduction of media material that already exists in pop-culture and is simply replicated and popularized within a chosen context. Secondly, the most popular medium of meme is the image, which is essentially non-verbal in nature. Non-verbal communication tools are not only inherently universal but also more easily believed and understood (Burgoon, Guerrero, & Floyd, 2010).

The fabric of a meme is always designed to share a universal idea or a universally understood idea that can be made contextually relevant. Humour, which is the primary fabric of a meme is known to create intertextual references that rely partly on the cultural memory of that particular community, and partly on global cultural influences, thus producing hybrid cultural texts (Lainest & Voolaid, 2017). The famous 'distracted boyfriend' template is a classic example. The idea within the picture is somewhat universally understood – what we have versus what we want, and this central idea is duplicated in contextual variations – making the meme template viral, but the ideas within it diverse. Hence, the inherent fabric of a meme doesn't require homogeneity. As long as it propagates a representation that is openly interpretative and overtly popularized, the template can gain a cult interest, and thus lead to multiple duplications.

Memes encompass a mass idea, and the validation that consumers receive by reaffirming their identity as a part of the mass idea will only occur when they share the meme. The constant need of solidarity – the feeling that one belongs to a particular brand of culture – is satisfied through the sharing and not mere collection of memes. We could say that this exchange is never fully rewarding because one meme in itself cannot be representative of the entire individual, nor the different types of subcultures that one might adhere to.

The making of a 'meme culture'

Like conventional cultures, the meme culture is not defined by a constructed social code. It is essentially an amalgamation of several subcultures and schools of thought. Hence, the social fact within the umbrella of meme culture is never truly universal in nature, barring the very structure of a meme. Hence, 'universality' of representation within meme culture is often very selective, and this selective existence of thought can sometimes be extended as a tool to practice the propaganda of cultural advocacy. This skewed representation might become threatening by way of assimilation of groups that either emerge as byproducts of majoritarian ideology.

However, it would be interesting to question whether memes catering to several subcultures are able to retain universal relevance without assimilating minority opinions. If the meme culture encompasses a certain brand of class, caste, opinions, thoughts and humour on the internet, the sub-cultures that emerge out of them aren't the only ones that exist in and outside the web. It simply means that there is an adequate population representing those specific societies on the internet and this doesn't implicate the non-existence of other cultures whose representations do not exist by way of memes. Keeping the above discourse in mind, we now look closely at what kind of cultural experiences, psychological factors fuel the creation and rise of socially deviant memes. By socially deviant memes, we refer to memes that perpetuate a regressive idea or a politically insensitive ideology. Politically insensitive memes are a reflection of politically insensitive thoughts. The fact that it is the audience themselves who generate and consume memes explains a lot about the cultural mind-set that societies are living in, and if socially deviant memes exist today, it is simply because some communities are willing to promote it. Propaganda is not the only factor that leads to the generation of these memes. What is sociologically looked upon as trivialization is simply a manifestation of extreme humour for some audiences (Singh, 2018). If this is the argument we choose to consider, the memes that are otherwise observed as socially problematic can be justified under the paradigm of a culture that embraces dark humour.

The internet is filled with Dalit memes – memes that trivialize their problems, violence, deaths and instigate the caste hierarchy. The theory of subalternity applies in digital spaces where little or no Dalit representation leads to marginalization of caste based experiences (Smith, 2010). In her paper 'Theorizing the digital Subaltern', author Sara Morais (2013) says that there is an acute naturalization of popularly represented perspectives on the internet. Hence, the audience that consumes Dalit memes is regressively classist and elitist in nature, either belonging to the *Varna system* where they have profited from it or not belonging to the caste system at all, thus failing to understand the gravity of it. The audience that would engage in culturally insensitive memes would most often, belong to a culture external to the one that is being trivialized.

If we're to further define the grounds on which the external groups find culturally insensitive memes funny, it emerges from a deep-rooted hegemonic system that provides audiences the space to reinforce their bourgeois stature. To reiterate, audiences consuming Dalit memes have access to internet, education and class, all of which are forms of cultural capital acquired through privilege.

Another extension to all of the above factors is essentially the fact that the internet is an unmonitored 'safe' space. By virtue of being an open platform, the accountability that might compel one to be politically correct on the internet does not exist. And because there is no policing, there is no fool-proof manner in which hate memes can be monitored on the internet. This byproduct that emerges out of subcultures assimilating cannot be monitored, because disregarding cultural relativism provides the space to disengage with problems that don't concern one. Hence, although the sharing of culturally diverse memes is universal, consumers have the leeway to practice selective social solidarity within their socially defined safe spaces. These safe spaces created out of subcultures exist as independent entities on the internet. Hence, the niche quality of safe spaces arises from a sort of cultural relativism built from different experiences. Because sharing of a Dalit meme within a Dalit rights community wouldn't receive the same applause as any other, there is little leeway for Dalits to be able to disengage from their own painful narrative.

However, safe spaces and defining sub-cultures aren't always specific in nature. They are intersectional, and for topics that don't necessarily deal with issues of cultural anomaly specifically, the lines of defining particular sub-cultures are blurred. Undoubtedly, the specific memories through which individuals relate to memes may be diverse, however, as long as the experience of the incident, sentiment or emotion is shared, the meme hits home. Here, we see that the categories of sub-cultures are broader and appeal more universally. These memes don't necessarily require disengagement with a particular cultural phenomenon because they aren't overtly threatening to one's cultural beliefs.

Conclusion

While social facts and societal representations are reflected through memes, it is pivotal that we evaluate who creates and generates these perceptions of social facts. While the primary focus of the paper was to evaluate meme subcultures and the resulting marginalization, there are independent sub-cultures created through memes that aren't detrimental to minorities or hateful towards cultural deviance. Additionally, we also see the duality of internet meme culture in that it is 'universally representative' by the virtue of being 'universally assimilating'. To bring yet another layer of argumentation, it would be interesting to study how propaganda through memes is promoted for purely capitalistic ends. The ideas that could be explored within this discourse is the dilution of unbiased, accountable, legitimate guidelines within conventional advertising platforms with the introduction of memes. As memes acquire an increasing stake in the impact they make on communication, culture and society, it becomes increasingly important for us to evaluate them through a lens that looks at critique beyond humour.

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