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SEASONING PEDAGOGY: INCLUSION OF CULINARY APPROACHES IN LEARNING

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Abstract

Cuisine and culinary traditions are potent tools while looking at the various facets of a nation, race, community, sect, religion, class, caste or group. Culinary studies are a type of pedagogy that can help the students in understanding the nuances of a particular culture and the intricacies of their functioning respectively. It would be a more empathetic way of unraveling, learning, analyzing, evaluating and understanding any given part of history or culture, than mere facts. In the 21st century, we aim to create a pedagogy that emphasizes global empathy and sensitivity. Culinary studies as an area of study and research are promising in its approach, wherein the universality of traditions and practices are brought to the forefront. By re-visioning, our histories from a culinary point of view we can fill in the subaltern silences about gender, sexuality, race, class and caste. By reevaluating the role food plays in global politics, from time immemorial, we can bring in a more holistic way of assessing our past. This also aids in bringing about policies and changes that benefit the minorities, since culinary analysis promotes inclusive approaches and resolutions. In an age where gastronomical diplomacy is flourishing widely, including Culinary studies as a part of the pedagogy and using its inclusive powers would aid in raising sensitivity in humanity. Further, Cuisine goes hand in hand with various other fields of study such as science, arts, philosophy, and economics etc., which help in promoting more interdisciplinary studies that

can provide tangible results. Hence, this paper attempts to focus on the need for a conscious addition of culinary themes, devices and perspectives in academic analysis and pedagogy.

Keywords

Cuisine, Global Empathy, Inclusiveness, Pedagogy, Re-visioning, Universality

1. Introduction

Food plays a decisive role in the lives of people irrespective of gender, race, nationality, class, language or age. It is a fundamental part of human life and expression. The study of food, cooking, eating and other culinary practices in any given text, region, culture, community or society are termed as Culinary studies. It is a diverse branch of study that crisscrossed with most other studies due to its flexibility and universality. Hence, culinary studies can be easily modelled into an interdisciplinary field of study and can be formulated based on our requirements.

Culinary studies, despite gaining prominence in recent times, are still in its nascent stage. It is seen as a separate field, and despite its flexibility is yet to be adapted into mainstream pedagogy. It is yet to be utilised as pedagogical tools in our teaching and learning methodology, to facilitate a better understanding of cultures, while exploring the past. Education provided to students functions around the idea of educating them about the world that we live in and creating a sense of global empathy while understanding the different worldviews. Hence, there is a timely need to consciously include culinary approaches that illustrate the nuances of cultures, in our curriculum right from students' youth. This paper attempts to explore the significance of reading food and culinary practices and thereby assert the need for culinary approaches in teaching and learning.

2. Significance of culinary perspectives in learning

2.1 Indicative of Power Structures

Food is never merely a tool that satiates hunger in any given context or setting. It is invested with a set of power that drives and manipulates the social order:

[T]he power that society allocates or denies to men and women through their access to and control of one essential resource: food. Men's and women's ability to produce, provide and distribute and consume food is a key measure to their power. This ability varies according to their culture,

their class, and their family organization, and the overall economic structure of their society. (Counihan & Kaplan, 1973, p. 1-2)

Analysing food becomes important in learning for the same reason. A theoretical understanding of the centrality of food in daily lives would assist the students in developing fresh perspectives while observing the power structures in the world and promotes inclusiveness.

2.2 Unlearning to Relearn

Also, in today's world education goes beyond learning new facts and concepts. Educational systems need to focus on instilling sensitivity and empathy while approaching global topics. "Food is important. Nothing is more basic. Food is the first of the essentials of life, our biggest industry, our biggest export, and our most frequently indulged pleasure. Food means creativity and diversity" (Belasco, 2006, p. viii). A culinary approach could prove more malleable and has the power to raise awareness in a student's consciousness and stimulate creativity. Further, culinary devices and themes, though side-lined in mainstream pedagogy, are a persuasive technique of verbalising issues and working towards the resolution of the same. Besides, the universal quality of the theme proves effective in grabbing attention and filling the subaltern silences. Re-reading old texts from a culinary perspective would disentangle the inherent silences and erasure that time and power have manifested in literary and non-literary historiographies. The culinary approach would be a fitting tool for re-visioning cultures, traditions, histories, economies, literature and education at large.

Inclusion of culinary narratives and culinary approaches in the mainstream global pedagogical system would reinforce the need to be inclusive of varied opinions and cultural practices. The culinary study is based on an exchange of knowledge that is ancestral, cultural, social and economic. At the same time, it also evaluates the influence and affects various other factors, such as nationality, ethnicity, religion, gender, class, caste, politics and progress, have on food, cooking and eating experiences. Culinary writing includes both fictional and non-fictional writings on cuisine and culinary practices of a culture, community, religion group/sector individual. It explores the various facets of preparation, cooking, distribution and consumption of food, to identify a narrative that distinctly clarifies the importance of food in a person's life.

Culinary metaphors are used and deciphered by readers across time and space. Food is used as a symbol in various texts to highlight the nuances of a culture or community and the

system that operates within these groups. “The food habits of each cultural group are often linked to religious beliefs and ethnic behaviours. Eating is a daily reaffirmation of [that] cultural identity.” (Kittler & Sucher, 2007, p. 4) Analysing food tropes reveal the problems that these systems pose and the solutions for the same. It is a vast area which provides a space for diverse interpretations and understanding. Such a multitude of interpretations is what makes it a field that needs to be studied. By introducing a culinary approach, we could materialise the need for personalised opinions instead of mass-communicated propagandas that are most often biased in who they benefit. Carol J. Adams and Virginia Messina in their cookbook *Protest Kitchen: Fight Injustice, Save the Planet, and Fuel your resistance One Meal at a Time* (2018) discuss the political and commercial angles in the promotion of meat-based diets. They also use food to register their resistance against the same— “animal oppression is related to human oppression and how changing the way we look at animals and removing barriers of otherness fortify our ability to view all beings (including all people) with respect” (p. 3). Culinary metaphors or symbols possess flexibility which helps in reading it from multiple angles. The multiplicity of opinions and views can be promoted and appreciated to instil the spirit of contribution and participation in students.

The culinary approach facilitates a discourse that centres on peace and common experiences, wherein people who are engaged in the study can find a common ground of understanding and appreciation, and can propagate a shift in perspective amidst the society, in terms of how we interact with other cultures and traditions. The unknown aspects of any culture or community can be better expanded and explored when the tool is related to cuisine. This is evident in the way soft powers like cuisine are given primacy in diplomatic initiatives and ventures. An apt example for the same is how Korean cuisine was promoted by the government through various outreach programmes at the beginning of 21st century— “South Korean authorities have become conscious of the potential of food culture as a powerful ambassador of the Korean ‘brand’” (Cwierka, 2012, p. 8). Through this we can understand that:

Cooking is not just a way of preparing food but of organizing society around communal meals and predictable mealtimes. It introduces new specialized functions and shared pleasures and responsibilities. It is more creative, more constructive of social ties than mere eating together. It can even replace eating together as a ritual of social adhesion. (Fernández-Armesto, 2002, p. 4-5)

What education aims to achieve is to provide the students with a better understanding to observe and empathise with the multicultural aspects of life and living. We wish to promote a holistic growth that is based on the zeal to learn novel ideas and approaches, while also remaining rooted in one's sense of self. This is also accompanied by the need to unlearn stereotypes and racist, misogynistic, sexist or classist ideas. Through culinary themes and devices, students would be allowed to view the world and its socio-economic growth regarding evolution and adaptation. For example, Daniel Stone's *The Food Explorer: The True Adventures of the Globe-Trotting Botanist Who Transformed What America Eats*, is a text that focuses on the development of what we call the present day 'American cuisine' by following the adventures of David Fairchild. This book offers a glimpse into the way crops were brought in, multiplied and have evolved in the American land. A study of the same would help today's youth to understand that, an 'American culinary experience' is a culmination and inclusion of various cultures and their ingredients. Thus, a culinary perspective would be able to better explain why the United States is seen as a 'melting pot' of cultures.

2.3 Reading Food

The cuisine is frequently used in literature to illuminate the emotional state of a character or the cultural facet that is a part of the character's identity. In addition to this, it could also be used to record the idea of rebellion and dissent by fracturing the culinary structure or by articulating the taboo about gastronomy in a given culture. Anita Nair's novel *Alphabet Soup for Lovers* (2015) is a good example to understand the socio-cultural rules that are instilled in each dish or ingredient. This can be read in the chapter titled *Oorkai* (Pickle):

There are rules and rules about making oorkai ... You must make it before the moon disappears entirely behind the clouds on an Amavasya night. You can't touch the oorkai when you are menstruating. You can't touch the pickle pot after being with a man. I don't set store by all that rubbish. My only rule when it comes to oorkai is that there should be no moisture or heating once the tempering of the oil is done ... Sometimes we must make our own rules. (p. 123)

Nair's novel, like many other fictional works that are grouped under culinary fiction, is seen by critics as fiction that uses cuisine as an analogy or metaphor. The polyglottic nature of the culinary tropes are not analysed and theorised deeply, which is what a conscious inclusion of culinary approach could help solve. The power of culinary devices to provide an

in-depth understanding of traditions, social structures, culture and worldviews could be accessed well with a culinary reading of texts and works of art.

Also, non-fictional texts such as cookbooks and newspaper columns on food could be seen as registering the intricacies of a specific cuisine, geography, religion or culture. Cookbooks are seen as ancillary memoirs, journals and biographies that act as an expression of a community and assist in connecting one generation with the other, especially the women. Cookbooks represent “culinary knowledge [that] is collectively generated. Because it is knowledge accumulated over time, it acquires a patina of meaning that may be called upon to celebrate culture, challenge prevailing stereotypes, and simply preserve a vanishing way of life” (Theophano, 2002, p. 51). Thus, using a cookbook as a text helps understand the oppression that women were subjected to, wherein we use their recipes as a way of dissecting the silence that mainstream literature has permitted by repressing female voice. Cooking here provides them agency to articulate their thoughts and register their dissatisfaction. Cookbooks could also be seen as being instrumental in keeping the female lineage alive and thriving.

The culinary language in both fiction and non-fiction translates the fact that food is one of the crucial elements that people use for self-expression. Further, the cuisine is also an area that is most receptive to influences and changes. The minute changes or fusion in cuisines when analysed reveal more about a culture or nation than history books do. Culinary writings from oppressed communities and war-torn areas reveal details that the mainstream narratives evade or fail to register. Plus, narratives surrounding the idea of the diaspora could be efficiently brought to limelight when we look at the culinary linguistic in it. Culinary devices work certainly well with literary techniques, triggering memories and paving way for nostalgic flashbacks. This helps transcend the element of time in the narrative. Sometimes, as Anita Mannur (2010) points out, “[t]he desires to remember home by fondly recreating culinary memories cannot be understood merely as reflectively nostalgic gestures ... [they should also] be read as a metacritique of what it means to route memory and nostalgic longing for a homeland” (p. 29) through one’s culinary practices “which unflinchingly yoke national identity with culinary taste and practice” (p. 29). Hence, there is a timely need for us to bring cuisine and culinary arts into the spotlight to crack down the forced silences and erasures.

Even when culinary arts are represented in the form of culinary tropes, symbols or metaphors, they can be seen as tools that attract the attention of the readers quite easily, due to its variety—which amuses the readers and universality that acts as a common link between

the author, character and reader. Cuisine creates a middle ground that works towards understanding the novelty of issues and cultures. Food and cuisines are constantly in evolution due to various factors that bring each ingredient in a meal together. Therefore, the idea of authenticity is hugely debatable and instead suggests the osmotic nature of culinary traditions. Lizzie Collingham retraces the culinary transitions that sprung from colonial influences in India, in her book *Curry: A Tale of Cooks and Conquerors* (2005) where she points out that the Portuguese chilli supplanted the black and long pepper due to its “similar hot taste”, easier growth and storage and cheaper prices (p. 53).

Above all of these, food is one of the significant spaces where the fusion between literature and culture takes place. It generates an imaginative space which is pertinent for talking about the experiences of an individual or a group of people from a cultural background. Consequently, reading food in literature is an attempt at translating the issues and habits of a macrocosm by looking at a microcosm—the characters and settings in a given text. Hence, culinary tropes are vital because the food here is not used for satisfying the biological need of hunger, but is used to gratify a deeper symbolic need of finding one’s self-identity, which is defined by his/her cultural, social, economic and religious identity. Reading a particular ingredient or food in a culture translates the profound symbolism it bears both as a literary element and as a cultural component. Something as simple as ‘an apple’ bears an array of significance and values across cultures. It could be used to connote the original sin of Eve in a biblical context, it could allude to Snow White and the cruelty of her stepmother or could also be used to connote the ‘Golden Apple of Immortality’ that Alexander the Great was hunting for (Civitello, 2008, p. xv). Food possesses a depth and symbolic value conditioned by how the author chooses to use it and how the readers decipher the same, based on his/her knowledge about various cultures. Food becomes a site of fusion wherein various cultural, literary and culinary elements are amalgamated to form a whole.

2.4 Voicing Difference

Food is a tool that everyone has access to, and due to its universal quality, everybody comprehends the politics and nuances of it. “Eating is indeed inseparable from personhood.” (Xu, 2008, p. 4) Hence, food becomes a shared tool for protest and rebellion for the people from the minority or oppressed groups. This is why fasting becomes an important part of the protest. Many authors use food metaphors to highlight the idea of gender bias and oppression through food, in their novels.

The cuisine is intertwined with the lives of people and their cultures. Something as simple as seasonings used in a dish could translate diversity and emphasize the importance of validating their presence. “Seasonings can be used to classify cuisines culturally. Unique seasoning combinations, termed as flavour principles, typify the food of ethnic groups worldwide. They are so distinctive that few people mistake their use.” (Kittler & Sucher, 2007, p. 8) We need to identify how food acts as an identity marker that illustrates the boundaries each character or person constructs around himself/herself using cuisine. It also attempts to explore how these cultural, social, economic and personal boundaries about cuisine, cooking and eating are influenced, restructured and at times shattered by external factors or influences.

Further, as mentioned earlier, food also becomes the site where protest and resistance largely thrive. “Just as giving creates connection, refusing it severs the connection. Both giving and refusing can be a means of attaining power” (Counihan & Kaplan, 1973, p. 6). The habitual nature of food, cooking and eating make is a tool available for everyone to represent resistance and subversion. This can be seen in the protest fasting that leaders or groups perform for a political, social or cultural cause/reason. It can also be seen in the mushrooming trend of Conflict Kitchens. As the *Conflict Kitchen* homepage highlights, they are food stalls created to cook and serve the “cuisine from countries with which the United States conflicts”. It is believed that such an effort can help promote a sense of familiarity for the nations and aid in bringing them to the spotlight. In times like these, it becomes important to sensitise today’s youth regarding the same. Engaging with literature or art about such resistances will help kids educate themselves regarding global conflicts in a much healthier manner.

2.5 Teacher-Student Dynamics

Pedagogy is a system that is put in place to expand the knowledge of students through a given set of rules, syllabus, methodology and approaches. But the most vital component in the functioning of pedagogy is the two parties involved—teacher/professor and student. One of the crucial points to note when analysing the effect of a system of education is the relationship the instructor and students are expected to share. A didactic approach to education would not work in creating sensitive human beings. Further, living in a multicultural milieu ensures that we find a middle ground for the parties involved. The role of an educator becomes important in instigating and achieving this transformation because “(e)ven though modern digital technologies provide students with a wide range of the newest

information about the world, the teacher's role in providing students with global knowledge acts as an invaluable moving force in educating students and developing their personality characteristics"(Sinagatullin, 2009, p. 19). A conscious inclusion of culinary themes in education would also help in the bonding of the students and teachers since cuisine is not restricted to age and is an experience that would improve the relationship between a teacher and student, even if they don't share a similar racial, social, cultural or linguistic background. The novelty in cuisine is more welcomed and flexible to alterations based on personal aspects.

2.6 Changing Trends

Pedagogy is "not just something that happens in the classroom. It becomes a question of "how knowledge is produced, and how subject positions are constructed" in historical and political ways" (Myrsiades and Myrsiades, 1994, p. viii). In today's world, food and water are becoming resources that are most affected by modernisation and globalisation. They also remain as one of the factors that connect the past with the present, in terms of the changing trends in cuisine, and a factor that connects the present to its future—conserving the healthy culinary practices for a better future. As "radical pedagogy of engaged intellectuals is connected to the politics of everyday life" (1994, p. viii), the inclusion of culinary perspective would be an act of instilling reflective consciousness in each meal of ours. Thus, it is a field that needs more research to formulate a narrative that traces its influence, effect and evolution. Through this research, we shall explore the field of culinary writing which is a field that needs to be studied alongside other literary and cultural studies to understand the interconnection between culture, food and literature.

Additionally, cuisine, cooking and culinary tradition, as a field of art, could offer students an alternative to experiencing artistic talent. Combining the theoretical education of culinary themes alongside practical experimentation of the culinary experience could produce a result wherein the next generation learn to bond with and through food. Such an approach would be simpler and in other words a bite-size solution to global awareness and empathy. Even though food is prized as a crucial cultural asset it is always forgotten while implementing serious actions and policies. Where politics and policies fail, a plate of food could create a sense of empathy and sensitivity. Inclusive politics on the microscopic level can be instigated through food and eating. This, in turn, would amount to tangible changes and adaptations in the society.

3. Conclusion

Culinary approach functions as a polyglottic literary device that thrives in both literary and non-literary contexts. The multidimensional essence of culinary devices aids in introducing complex ideas and theories to students in a way that resonates with universality. This works as a practical solution in making our curriculum innovative and stimulating. When education is turned into an art that both teaches and delights, we reinforce the essence of knowledge and also aid in creating a pedagogy that is versatile and inclusive. This approach would diversify the learning experience, opening our syllabus to alternative art forms that serve to educate and enrich the youth's knowledge. It would benefit from creating a stress-free space where students can come together freely to learn with a curious heart and mind. Hence, a conscious inclusion of culinary approaches in education is the need of the hour. It is also a tool that would help in instilling sensitivity and empathic mind set in today's youth while understanding and approaching the diverse worldviews in society.

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