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MASTER'S THESIS

**Characters and Relationships
through Food and Drink in Indian Cinema**

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DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

**Postavy a vztahy
prostřednictvím jídla a pití v indickém filmu**

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Declaration

I declare that I have prepared my Master's Thesis, Dissertation independently on the following topic:

Characters and Relationships through Food and Drink in Indian Cinema

under the expert guidance of my thesis advisor and with the use of the cited literature and sources.

Prague, date :

Signature of the candidate

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Abstract

In India, an image of a person or persons eating can reveal significant information about their identity, their emotional status and the nuances of their relationships. This dissertation attempts to understand the different ways in which food, drink and associated practices, traditions, rituals, beliefs and behaviours are used in Indian films to depict identities like caste, class, community, religion, gender, and beliefs of characters, their emotions and the dynamics of their relationships. The thesis will analyse how Indian filmmakers use camera angles and movement, shot sizes, colour, props, lighting, performances, music and other filmmaking tools to convey this information in “food scenes”.

Abstrakt (in Czech language)

V Indii obrázek jedlících muže odhalit významné informace o jejich identitě, jejich emocionálním stavu a nuancích jejich vztahů. Tato disertační práce se pokouší porozumět různým způsobům, jakými se jedení, pití a související jednání, tradice, rituály, přesvědčení a chování používají v indických filmech k zobrazení identit, jako je kasta, třída, komunita, náboženství, pohlaví, přesvědčení postav i jejich emoce a dynamika jejich vztahů. Práce bude analyzovat, jak indiští filmaři využívají úhly a pohyb kamery, velikosti záběrů, barvy, rekvizity, osvětlení, performance, hudbu a další filmařské nástroje k předávání těchto informací ve „scénách jídla“.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter 1 - Food and Conflict - <i>Masaan</i>	11
<i>Juice</i> - Food, Women and Rebellion	21
<i>Geeli Puchchi</i> - Food, Caste and Rebellion	23
Chapter 2 - Food, Love and Loneliness - <i>The Lunchbox</i>	27
<i>Hum Saath Saath Hain</i> and the Happy Family	37
Chapter 3 - Food and the Concept of the “Other” - <i>Bajrangi Bhaijaan</i>	40
<i>Padmavat</i> and the Cruel Non-Vegetarians	49
<i>Dangal</i> - Non Vegetarian Food and ‘Breaking the Rules’	52
Chapter 4 - Food for Comedic Purpose - <i>3 idiots</i>	54
<i>PK</i> - Food Religion and Confusion	64
<i>Delhi Belly</i> - City, Food and Hygiene	69
Conclusion	74
Bibliography	78
Filmography	80

Introduction

Food in Films

“Food scenes, a regular staple of popular films, are more than meets the tongue and function more significantly than to just nurture the body and satiate the appetite. Although depicted as a seemingly natural function, food scenes in film not only signify social class, identity, and nationality but also provide insight into the complex ways in which food and eating are entangled with other aspects of social/cultural development. A close observation of food scenes within the narrative framework of the film reveals its powerful, coded, cultural meanings that structure the arrangements of social life.” (Ferry, 2014)

I was referencing films to see how I could make a dinner scene in my short film more effective. I came across a scene in the film titled “Masaan” (2015) where the director, Neeraj Ghaywan, revealed so much information about the characters’ caste, class, religion, their roles as adult members of a family and other nuances about their identities, emotions and relationship in a short dinner scene. I was thoroughly impressed and curious to find out how food is used in Indian films to reveal different facets of characters’ identities, their emotions and their relationships. That is what this thesis aims to explore.

“Food in India is an identity marker of caste, class, family, kinship, tribe affiliation, lineage, religiosity, ethnicity, and increasingly, secular group identification. How one eats, what one eats, with whom, when, and why, is key

to understanding the Indian social landscape as well as the relationships, emotions, statuses, and transactions of people within it.” (Srinivas, 2011)

India is a diverse country with a rich diversity in food and practices and behaviours associated with food. Certain food practices and rituals are unique to specific communities and social groups within India and can provide nuanced information about them. This thesis intends to look at different aspects of a meal - food on the plate, serveware, where people sit, who cooks the food, who serves the food/drinks, who eats it and who doesn't, how they eat and drink, how people interact during a meal, what they say to each other, etc. to understand the characters their emotions and their relationships with each other.

Food in India

Food has ceased to solely be a necessity for survival and now is a social, political, and cultural activity. In India, it is etched with many rituals, traditions, norms, values, practices and beliefs.

In my personal life, I have interacted with several people from different social, economic and political groups over food. Many of these experiences have been unique in providing a deeper insight into the lives and identities of these people. For example, in certain settings, using a fork and spoon to eat would be considered pretentious, while in other settings, eating with hands would be considered impolite. While we eat at a dining table at home with steel/ceramic plates, during specific festivals, the custom is to eat sitting on the floor on a banana leaf.

There are certain general rules about how people eat, and seeing how people follow them or not can provide valuable insight into people's lives, beliefs and relationships. For example, it is commonly known that an upper caste person will not eat with a lower caste person. So, when one sees someone eating at a table and the other away from it, it is easy to understand who is at the higher and lower end of the caste hierarchy. Similarly, knowing people's caste identities, and seeing an upper caste person and a lower caste person eat together, can reflect a person's lack of belief in the "superiority" and "inferiority" based on caste.

Vegetarianism in the west may primarily be understood as being environmentally conscious. However, in India, it is a considerable political debate and gives insight into people's religion, caste and political affiliations. Certain states in India have banned the consumption of beef owing to the dominant majority of Hindu sentiment who believe cows to be holy. There have been incidents of brutal violence against those suspected of eating beef in the said states. It is common to discriminate against those that eat what one doesn't.

"The widespread gender disparity in India can also be seen through food; how it is generally the woman of the house making and serving food, yet always eats last and eats away from the family". (Roncaglia, 2013). Whereas in more modern families, the woman will eat with everyone else.

Food is considered holy and is equated with God, and there are strict rules about respecting food. And these rules of respect will differ from person to person. My grandfather was a farmer, and hence in my family, like most families with a farming background, not finishing what is served on the plate is considered very rude. In

other families, this may pass. However, letting your foot touch a plate of food or any food item will generally be frowned upon.

There are several superstitions associated and expressed with food and food items. Yoghurt and sugar mixed together will be fed to a near one to wish them luck and success for an important day. Traditions with food items can also play a vital role in religious rituals. “Just in Hinduism, there are many examples; such as tying lemon topped with green chillies on a thread in a doorway, to warn away any negative energy of which may bring misfortune to the place”. (Bhalla, 2006)

“Food offering can be used to show affection to loved ones, to show hospitality to strangers...” (Hamburg et al., 2014). In India, where people place so much importance on food, it is a common tool for expressions of love, care and warmth. The Hindi phrase “*Maan ke Haath ka Khana*” which translates as “Food cooked by a mother”, gives it a special significance making it the most superior of all foods. Food is also an integral part of hospitality in India. In my home state, Goa, and many other parts of India, it is considered extremely rude to let guests leave without offering them something to eat or drink. It is common for hosts in India to overfeed their guests. People often appreciate hosts who force guests into eating more food.

India also has a stark diversity in peoples’ incomes, literacy and social status, enabling a stark contrast in hygiene levels maintained while cooking. Different individuals have different standards about what is acceptable and what is not. These standards are put to the test when it comes to street food in India, which is famous for its taste and infamous for its hygiene. The phrase “you are what you eat” holds true in India.

Research Aims

Barthes' study of “semiological signs”, as explained in his book “Elements of Semiology”, forms the basis of this dissertation. He explains that a sign is composed of a ‘signifier’ and ‘signified’. And the ‘signified’ is communicated through the ‘signifier’ (Barthes, 1968). Barthes explains that :

“...the signified is not 'a thing' but a mental representation of the 'thing'.”
(Barthes, 1968)

Food and associated actions, when studied as “semiological signs” and “sign - functions”, provide an opportunity for a deeper understanding of characters, their emotions and relationships. While the primary function of food may be to provide nourishment, it inevitably signifies several other things relevant to people’s identities, emotions and relationships. Barthes, in his Theory of Semiology, explains:

“Many semiological systems (objects, gestures, pictorial images) have a substance of expression whose essence is not to signify; often, they are objects of everyday use, used by society in a derivative way to signify something: clothes are used for protection and food for nourishment even if they are also used as signs. We propose to call these semiological signs, whose origin is utilitarian and functional, sign-functions.” (Barthes, 1968)

He adds

“This semantisation is inevitable: as soon as there is a society, every usage is converted into a sign of itself..” (Barthes, 1968)

In this study, I shall attempt to understand food and associated actions and objects as ‘signifiers’ and analyse what is ‘signified’.

“It is useful, in analysis, to be able to apply a rough rule of thumb which distinguishes those aspects of a sign which appear to be taken, in any language community at any point in time, as its ‘literal’ meaning (denotation) from the more associative meanings for the sign which it is possible to generate (connotation).” (Hall, 2005)

Stuart Hall explains that any sign carries a denotative meaning and a connotative meaning. Denotative meaning is the literal meaning of that image. And connotative meaning is everything else the sign signifies (Hall, 2005). In the context of food, for example, an image of a girl eating chicken could denote that she is eating chicken and that she is a non-vegetarian. However, its connotative meaning puts her in a particular spectrum of castes and religions, providing an insight into her varied identities. This dissertation aims to understand how directors convey information to the audience through connotative and denotative meanings of food and related actions.

Having been born in India and having lived here for a better part of my life, I am well versed with the general, more universal (to India) practices, rituals, superstitions, beliefs and rules of behaviour associated with food. Familiarity with India’s cultural context shall help me to understand the connotative meanings of food and related

activities as portrayed in films. It enables me to understand that which is 'signified' by the 'signifier'. The 'signifier' being food and associated objects and actions.

This study will primarily focus on how films and filmmakers use food and related actions as signs to - 1. Convey to the audience details about the character's identities, 2. Provide an insight into the characters' emotions, and 3. Help understand the dynamics in the characters' relationships. It tries to understand how the films and filmmakers use aspects of film-making like blocking, camera angles and movement, shot sizes, performances, music and others to convey the 'denotative' and 'connotative' meanings.

Structure

For the purpose of this study, four major goals achieved by food scenes have been identified. Each will be tackled in a separate chapter.

In the first chapter, titled "Food and Conflict", I shall study how food/ drink scenes have been crafted in films to depict the conflict between characters. Meals provide an opportunity for characters to be in each other's company. Food and associated objects and behaviours have been used by filmmakers to establish a conflict between these characters. In this chapter, we shall analyse how Director Neeraj Ghaywan uses beliefs, practices and rituals rooted in the Indian landscape to show conflict in his film titled "Masaan" (2015). We shall analyse two scenes from "Masaan" that uses a unique aspect of food behaviour in India. Neeraj Ghaywan, in his filmography, has used different aspects of food-related practices to show conflict and rebellion. He adds details to the scenes that reveal to the audience several layers of his

characters' identities and nuances in the dynamics of their relationships. We shall take a brief look at his short films titled "Juice" (2017) and "Geeli Puchchi" (2021, part of an anthology titled "Ajeeb Dastaans") to understand how Ghaywan uses different tools available to him as a director - props, camera movement and angles, shot size, editing, lighting and others to convey to the audience the "connotative" meaning of his scenes.

The second chapter, titled " Food, Love and Loneliness", will aim to understand how food and related activities can be used in films to express love and depict connection and loneliness. The role a meal plays in bringing people (friends, family and others) together is a crucial one. The phrase "A family that eats together, stays together" reflects the importance of shared meals in a family. It provides an opportunity for connection. But what happens when the people sitting together for a meal feel no connection, and what about when one doesn't have anyone to share a meal with? These are images that can provide significant information about characters' emotional states. The popular phrase "The way to a man's heart is through his stomach" is, in my opinion, reasonably valid. In fact, I believe that the way to anyone's heart is through their stomach. It takes some effort to cook a meal, and someone putting in that effort can be an act of love and affection. If the meal is tasty, it can satisfy, please and impress someone creating a connection between the two people. Several filmmakers have used food scenes to depict love and connection between two or more characters. Director Ritesh Batra uses food and related practices and systems that are unique to India to show love and loneliness in his film titled "The Lunchbox" (2013). We shall analyse three scenes from the film that depict loneliness, the struggle for love, and finding connection through food. I shall

strengthen my arguments by analysing another scene from the film titled “Hum Saath Saath Hain” (1999), which uses a lunch scene to depict a happy family.

In the third chapter, this thesis shall analyse how vegetarianism and non-vegetarianism in India provide an opportunity for drama. Vegetarianism in India is based on faith and religion. People’s dietary restrictions and preferences are based on their regional, religious, caste and other identities. Filmmakers have used vegetarianism and non-vegetarianism to reveal these identities of people. Director Kabir Khan uses vegetarianism and intolerance towards non-vegetarianism (amongst vegetarians) to depict a character arch in his film’s protagonist. In the third chapter titled “Food and the Concept of the “Other”, food scenes in the film “Bajrangi Bhaijaan” (2015) shall be analysed. Additionally, two films titled “Padmavat” (2018) and “Dangal” (2016) shall be briefly analysed to understand how the act of meat-eating is used by filmmakers and what it says about the characters.

Food has been popularly used for comedic purposes in films across the world. Unpredictable and inappropriate ingredients, bad hygiene, and inappropriate behaviour during a meal all provide an opportunity for humour. In the fourth chapter, titled “Food for Comedic Purpose”, food scenes from the film “3 Idiots” (2009) shall be analysed. Director Rajkumar Hirani uses different aspects of food and related practices and behaviour in India for comedic purposes in his film. Furthermore, a sequence of scenes of the film titled “PK” (2014) that evokes humour using religious rules associated with food shall also be briefly analysed. A study of food in Indian films would be incomplete without a scene featuring India’s street food. Director Abhinay Deo, in his film titled “ Delhi Belly” (2011), uses aspects of Indian urban life and its street food to build an extremely humorous scene which shall also be studied.

The thesis aims to explore and understand how different filmmakers have used food and associated actions rooted in the Indian context to provide insight to other filmmakers into how food-related rituals, practices, and behaviours that are rooted in one's own region and society could be used for dramatic purposes.

Chapter 1 - Food and Conflict - *Masaan*

We have watched several films where a character refuses food to express anger/ protest/ frustration and conflict. We have seen characters leave the dinner table while someone/everyone is still seated or be asked to leave the dinner table for misbehaving. The rich cultural diversity of India provides an opportunity for filmmakers to use beliefs and practices associated with food, rooted in the Indian landscape, to reveal nuanced truths about characters, their identities, their emotions and their relationships.

This chapter will focus on the film titled “Masaan” (2015) and analyse how director Neeraj Ghaywan expresses conflict in his film through food and related beliefs and practices. Two scenes will be explored in detail to understand how each choice helps the audience learn about the characters, their identities and their relationships. We shall also analyse how director Neeraj Ghaywan depicts conflict using food/ drink and associated actions and practices in his short films titled “Juice” (2017) and “Geeli Puchchi” (2021).

Masaan tells parallel stories of Devi and Deepak, living by the Ganges in Banaras. Devi struggles to put in place her life that was shaken after she was caught having a pre-marital sexual relationship. Parallely, Deepak tries to break free from the situation his caste has imposed on him.

Devi (26) and her boyfriend rent a hotel room on an hourly basis (typical for sex workers in India) to be able to have sex. There is a police raid, and her boyfriend ends up killing himself. The police officer threatens to leak a video taken during the

raid and implicate her in the boy's suicide. He asks her father, Gangadhar, for a heavy bribe to protect them. The father and daughter go home. They have not spoken to each other or even made eye contact since the audience saw them together. At home, a dinner scene follows.

The scene begins with a wide shot of Gangadhar sitting on a bench-like sofa, pale-faced, expressionless, staring into the void. It cuts to another angle revealing Devi, placing a low stool next to a slightly higher one for Gangadhar to sit on (image 1.1). A low stool like that is commonly used by upper caste Brahmins (who are the “priest caste” and rank highest in the caste hierarchy) while performing holy rituals. It may be essential to note that these low stools are readily available in the market, and there are no strict rules about who can use them. Their common use, though, is during religious ceremonies and rituals. It gives the task being performed while seated on that stool an element of holiness and divinity. Therefore, it can be assumed that Gangadhar is a man who attaches a sacred value to food.



Image 1.1 - *Masaan* (dir. Neeraj Ghaywan, 2015). Devi sets a low stool and a higher tool for Gangadhar's dinner.



Image 1.2 - *Masaan* (dir. Neeraj Ghaywan, 2015). Devi serves him dinner for Gangadhar.

The caste system in India is based on the concept of “purity” and “pollution”. It is interesting to note how director Neeraj Ghaywan asserts the characters' several identities through food, to help understand the extent of the impact of the previous

scene. Diana Mickevičienė, in her study titled “Concept of Purity in the Studies of the Indian Caste System”, analyses the work of famous French anthropologist and sociologist Louis Dumont. Quoting him, she writes:

“Castes are ranked according to their ritual purity; their contacts are limited in order to preserve the purity of the purer ones from the polluting effect of the impure; separation of labour is aimed at keeping pure and impure occupations apart as well as at enabling impure occupations to maintain the purity of the pure ones.” (Dumont 1980, as cited in Mickevičienė, 2003)

Mickevičienė adds:

“Dumont says that most manifestly purity and impurity can be seen in the traditional occupations of the two extremes: Brahmans traditionally being priests or Men Of learning, knowledge, and Untouchables -cleaning, removing dead animals and serving the higher castes. “ (Dumont 1980, as cited in Mickevičienė, 2003)

Mickevičienė explains that:

“Personal purity lowers down because of contact with the polluting element which is death, birth, physical dirt, contact with a low-caste (even an eye-contact or shadow thrown by him), bad deed etc.” (Mickevičienė, 2003). She adds, “If we go, for example, through the pages of the Dharmashastras -The Law Code books of ancient India - we can easily see that they are most of all concerned with maintaining personal purity, which is constantly threatened by various types of pollution.” (Mickevičienė, 2003)

Gangadhar, a Brahmin man whose caste plays an important part in his social status and respectability, is now faced with a situation in which his daughter could have been said to have committed an “impure” deed (premarital sexual intimacy), an act of “pollution”. Thus significantly challenging his honour, respectability and status in society.

Devi walks into the kitchen. Gangadhar walks to the dinner set up, adjusts the low stool and sits down. He sits expressionless again, staring at nothing as he waits for Devi to bring him food. Devi brings rice on a steel plate and pours him a cup of water. We understand from the serveware and the contents of the meal (only plain rice) that Gangadhar is not a man of financial means. And the bribe money that the corrupt police officer asked for is a lot for him to pay. It helps the audience understand the gravity and tragedy of the situation. Gangadhar waits motionless till Devi goes away.

Devi, serving him dinner, suggests that she may be the only woman in the house. This job would otherwise be her mother’s. In an article published in Hindustan Times, titled “Why do women eat last? Understanding gender bias in India”, authored by Parvinder Singh, Head of Communications for World Food Programme India, Singh explains:

“Household roles concerning food in traditional homes are well-defined - male members are responsible for bringing food from the market and women are responsible for cooking and serving the food.” (Singh, 2021)

Drawing from a research conducted by United Nations World Food Programme and a state-level NGO SAMARTH in Uttar Pradesh focused on two districts - Lucknow and Fatehpur, Singh explains:

“Though women cook the food, yet it is the husband or children or the elderly (especially men) in the household who eat the food first in more than two-thirds of the households. Women are the last to eat after all have had their fill. These findings were more pronounced in Fatehpur because it is more rural and traditional”. (Singh, 2021)

The fact that Devi does not eat with her father could signify her state of mind or the traditional and patriarchal set-up of the household, where women eat after the men have eaten. In either case, the enormity of the tragedy of the incident is further established. In a patriarchal household, her actions are to bear worse consequences.

The film cuts to a medium close-up of Gangadhar as he begins eating. He tries to gather a bite but cannot. He tries again. We hear him pour water, and the camera tilts down to reveal Gangadhar rinsing his hands on a full plate (image 1.3).



Image 1.3 - *Masaan* (dir. Neeraj Ghaywan, 2015). Gangadhar pours water over his hands over a plateful of food.



Image 1.4 - *Masaan* (dir. Neeraj Ghaywan, 2015). Gangadhar stares at Devi after refusing food.

It is a common practice in traditional households in India to pour water out of your cup into your empty plate (after finishing a meal) to rinse your hands. It signifies the end of a meal. Food is considered a divine blessing, and this belief is re-asserted by Ghaywan in how Gangadhar's dinner is set (with a low stool used by Brahmin priests to sit on while performing holy rituals). Any form of even accidental disrespect to it is considered very rude. Rejecting and wasting food, more so intentionally, is also considered rude. By pouring water over a full plate, Gangadhar rejects the food that Devi has brought him. Refusing food in that manner displays his rage and frustration. The camera tilts up to show Gangadhar wiping his hands and looking at Devi. The two characters haven't looked at each other since they were introduced. Gangadhar looking at Devi, also stresses that this act of disrespect and anger was aimed towards her.

Ghaywan fully establishes the characters' identities of caste, class, and conservativeness with elements and actions associated with food to help the audience understand the full extent of the impact of the inciting incident. Having established these realities about the character, his gesture of pouring water over a full plate seems even more impactful.

Later in the film, the audience is introduced to Deepak, who belongs to a community that traditionally makes a living by burning funeral pyres at the river Ganges. Deepak belongs to an "inferior" caste. Deepak studies Engineering.

In a wide shot, the audience sees Deepak with two other men (his father and elder brother) and his mother sitting on the floor, eating lunch. In India, commonly, the affluent and upper middle and some middle-class families eat seated at a dining

table. Most middle-class and lower-middle-class families eat sitting on the floor. It does not reveal or re-assert anything about Deepak's caste but it helps to establish the difference in how Deepak's (low caste) family eats and Devi's (upper caste) father eats while sitting on a low stool.



Image 1.5 - *Masaan* (dir. Neeraj Ghaywan, 2015). Deepak's family is seen eating lunch in his home

Deepak's mother is seated near the utensils kept on the floor. She does not eat. It could be assumed that she is sitting there to serve the men. Based on Parvinder Singh's arguments in his article titled "Why do women eat last? Understanding gender bias in India", it could be argued that Deepak belongs to a traditional household. Later in the scene, we see Deepak's sister-in-law bring in hot rotis. It is common for women in more traditional homes to be frying hot flat bread when the rest of the family eats to be able to serve them hot. The labour of the women in Deepak's family is limited to housework. Hindu women are not allowed at cremation grounds ruling out the possibility that women in Deepak's family are involved in that work. Deepak's sister-in-law fries flatbread (a more demanding task) while his mother sits by the utensils to serve them on request, suggesting that there is a hierarchy at play in this household where more work is expected of those that are at the bottom of this hierarchy.

In the wide shot (image 1.5), Deepak's father asks him how long till he graduates. Deepak explains how in two months, he will have exams, after which there will be job placements. As Deepak answers, the scene cuts to a medium close-up of his brother, who looks uncomfortable. Back to the wide shot, Deepak's mother asks him if he will have to pay a bribe to get a job. Deepak refuses, explaining that things don't work like that anymore and those who do well at the interview get the job. Deepak's sister-in-law (brother's wife) enters the frame in the medium close-up of his brother. She serves flatbread to Deepak's father. She offers flatbread to Deepak's brother. He refuses. She insists by still trying to serve him. He gets irritated and gives her a sharp look (image 1.6). Insisting on serving more food and overfeeding guests or family members is considered a sign of warmth and affection in India. Deepak's brother refuses this affection with an irritated look, almost directing some other frustration at his wife.



Image 1.6 - *Masaan* (dir. Neeraj Ghaywan, 2015). Deepak's brother gets irritated at his wife for trying to serve him flatbread.

In a wide shot, Deepak's father notices this. He comments on Deepak's brother, saying there is so much work left to do (so many pyres to burn) while he (referring to Deepak's brother) stuffs himself here. Deepak's brother's reaction is seen in a medium close-up. This comment comes after he has just refused more food. He is visibly more irritated now. He replies, explaining that his uncle is there to supervise.

Deepak's father cuts him short, saying his uncle is a "junkie". Deepak's brother loses his calm and asks if he shouldn't eat. After a brief pause, his mother asks him to continue eating.

In a culture that expresses affection by overfeeding, stopping someone from eating can be considered a strong sign of expressing anger or disappointment. We have watched several Hollywood scenes where parents will ask troublesome children to stop eating and go to their room. However, denying someone food (especially a family member) is highly unusual in India. A comment like that from Deepak's father feels very harsh.

In a two-shot, Deepak's father asks Deepak how much salary he will draw. Deepak says he will find out after the interview. His father says it's best that he gets out of this situation soon. As he speaks, the scene cuts to the medium close-up of his brother. Deepak's father continues saying his life will otherwise be over, stoking the pyres of the dead here. Deepak's brother is infuriated. In a wide shot, he pushes his plate across the room to his wife (offscreen), asking her for more flatbread. He then gets up and leaves.

In the conversation over lunch, Deepak's father's comment about his elder son "stuffing" himself and his encouragement to his younger son to find a job and get out of here suggests his disappointment with his elder son. He is probably looking to his younger son to lift them from this poverty.

Deepak's brother, in protest, pushes his plate across the room, and it passes in front of his mother, Deepak and his father making a sharp sound (image 1.7). Pushing a

plate like that across the room can be considered a sign of disrespect and anger. Again, it is aimed at his wife. He has suffered humiliation from his father and received no support from his brother or his mother. The only small sign of affection he receives is from his wife. But her being a daughter-in-law, she is at the bottom of the hierarchy, and Deepak's brother is only a little higher. It establishes that while he cannot maintain his calm, he is not brave enough to aim the anger at his father.

Ghaywan reveals nuances about the character's identities and the power dynamics in their relationships using food and has his character express his frustration through food. The power dynamics in the family play a part later in the film when Deepak is required to make choices that could affect the expectations of his family.



Image 1.7 - *Masaan* (dir. Neeraj Ghaywan, 2015). Deepak's brother pushes his plate across the room.

Neeraj Ghaywan, in his filmography, uses food sequences very interestingly to show conflict. In his short films "Geeli Puchchi" and "Juice", Ghaywan goes beyond the element of respect and uses other aspects of food to depict conflict and rebellion.

Juice - Food, Women and Rebellion

In *Juice*, Ghaywan tells the story of how Manju (40) breaks free from her role of a servant to her husband. The film unfolds at a dinner party hosted by Manju and her husband for her husband's colleagues' families. He explores the stark contrast in the experience of a party for men and women in a middle-class household in a small town in North India.

The film opens with a scene in the living room. Four men are sitting on comfortable sofas in a well-lit living room, laughing over drinks and chicken. Manju is squatting on the floor near the coffee table, clearing bones and used tissue papers from the table. A fifth man enters the house with his pregnant wife, Rajni. He joins the men, and Manju leads Rajni through a dark narrow corridor to a kitchen. The kitchen is dimly lit, congested and barely ventilated. Five other women, including a house-help, are in the kitchen, all engaged in kitchen work. The kitchen is smoked up.



Image 1.8 - *Juice* (dir. Neeraj Ghaywan, 2017)
Men eat, drink and talk in the living room.



Image 1.9 - *Juice* (dir. Neeraj Ghaywan, 2017).
Women cook in the kitchen.

Ghaywan establishes the difference in the experience of a party for men and women powerfully through the contrast in the spaces they occupy and the activities they indulge in. He uses character actions, dialogues, lighting and soundscape to depict this contrast. While the men sit in comfortable chairs in an air-cooled, brightly lit living

room (image 1.8), the women toil in a hot, smokey kitchen cooking for the men (image 1.9). The soundscape of the kitchen is composed of cooking sounds. One can hear the women talking over a background of - whistles of a pressure cooker, the sound of a knife hitting the cutting board, and sounds of food frying in sizzling oil. In the living room, other than the men talking, the audience can hear the water from the air cooler dripping. The women are seen drenched in sweat. The smoke of spices tempering makes the women cough. The men eat, drink, discuss petty politics, their office and laugh often. The women are never seen eating the food they have cooked. On one occasion, they take a short break from cooking to drink tea. The tea almost serves as an energy drink before they return to cooking.

The men never cross the border and enter the kitchen throughout the film. The women, however, enter the living room on several occasions but only to serve the men or mind the children who disturb the men by running into the living room.

Manju struggles to turn on an old fan to help cool the kitchen. She asks her husband for help but gets ignored by him. Manju's frustration builds throughout the party as she toils in the kitchen and receives only commands from her husband with no gesture of help or support.



Image 1.10 - *Juice* (dir. Neeraj Ghaywan, 2017). Women watch Manju from inside the corridor.



Image 1.11 - *Juice* (dir. Neeraj Ghaywan, 2017). Manju sits in the living room, sipping juice, leaving the men uncomfortable.

The film ends with a small gesture of protest from Manju. Manju drags the chair from inside the kitchen through the dark corridor and into the living room. She sits by the air cooler and drinks a glass of juice. It makes all the men uncomfortable (image 1.11). In shock, the women peep into the living room through the corridor (image 1.10). Manju expresses her frustration and protest by simply drinking juice. But in the process, she breaks the boundaries of the space she is to occupy (kitchen) and drinks juice instead of cooking for or serving the guests. Her gesture makes an impact as these rules and boundaries are so clearly established by Ghaywan throughout the film.

***Geeli Puchchi* - Food, Caste and Rebellion**

The film tells the story of two lesbians, Bharti and Priya, who are united by their sexual identities but divided by caste. Bharti, a Dalit (an untouchable caste), belongs to a family of midwives. She has been pursuing the job of an accountant at the factory, but her upper caste Boss doesn't want a Dalit woman at a desk job. Priya (a Brahmin girl) is then hired for the job. Bharti lies to her about her caste, and the two become friends and develop feelings for each other. Bharti confides in her and reveals her caste. Priya is taken aback and starts maintaining distance from Bharti. Bharti realises and feels betrayed.

Priya is confused and not fully aware or accepting of her sexual identity. She blames herself for not being able to feel happy in her marriage. She speaks to Bharti about this, and Bharti, out of anger, advises her to have a child. Coming from a family of midwives, Priya seeks Bharti's help in getting pregnant. After Priya has delivered a baby, Bharti visits her at her home.

The scene opens with a wide shot as Priya's mother-in-law brings a tray with tea cups for Priya, Priya's husband, Bharti and herself. The shot cuts to a close-up of the tray. There is a small plate with biscuits, three ceramic tea cups and one steel cup. Priya's mother-in-law offers one ceramic cup to her son (Priya's husband). She offers the steel cup to Bharti (image 1.13). She proceeds to offer the other ceramic cup to Priya and take one for herself.



Image 1.12 - *Geeli Puchchi* (dir. Neeraj Ghaywan, 2021). Priya's mother-in-law brings tea for Bharti and others.



Image 1.13 - *Geeli Puchchi* (dir. Neeraj Ghaywan, 2021). Bharti is offered a steel cup.

We see Bharti's reaction in a medium-close-up as she is singly offered the steel cup. All societies probably witness class-based discrimination in terms of how people are served food and beverages. One may reserve the better serveware for guests and important people and offer serveware of less value for those they consider beneath them. In India, this attitude extends to caste-based identities too. I have on several occasions seen people adopt such discriminatory practices towards their house-helps and other workers. In India, most middle-class families eat out of steel plates and cups. Ceramic ones are reserved for guests and special occasions. However, most families usually drink tea out of ceramic cups. When some people at the table are served selectively in ceramic ware, which has a higher value and others are served in steel ware, it is a clear gesture of discrimination. This behaviour is normalised when there is a clear hierarchy in a relationship, for example- employer,

employee, guest and family member. In the case of Geeli Puchchi, Bharti is Priya's friend. She is an equal in that relationship. And in this situation, she is a guest, putting her slightly higher in that hierarchy. However, her caste identity restricts her position in the hierarchy to the bottom of Priya's upper caste family, never allowing her to be their equal. Bharti, who doesn't consider herself inferior to them, feels humiliated. This is the first point of conflict. Bharti has suffered at her job and in her feelings and relationship with Priya because of her caste. This is her final trigger.

Priya's family talks to Bharti normally as if what they have done is only normal. Priya's husband thanks her for her help and tells her that Bharti, who is currently handling Priya's responsibilities at work (having learnt the job from Priya when they were better friends), will not have to go through more trouble, and Priya intends to join back soon. Priya's mother-in-law interrupts, asking Bharti for help in convincing Priya and her husband why Priya should be staying at home. She adds that Bharti should know better, coming from a family of midwives. Bharti can't take this humiliation. She uses her caste identity and convinces Priya's family that it is in the best interest of Priya and her child that Priya quit the job.

The scene intercuts with a scene at the office where Bharti's boss informs Bharti that Priya has quit the job listing down the reasons that Bharti had given Priya's family for making Priya take this decision. Her boss asks her to take over Priya's job. Bharti agrees innocently.

The scene cuts back to Priya's home. After making her case for making Priya quit the job. Bharti picks up the steel cup and victoriously sips her tea out of it (image 1.14). She uses her caste identity to avenge herself for the discrimination she has faced by

advising Priya and her family to make Priya quit the job with the motive of securing the accountant's job.



Image 1.14 - *Geeli Puchchi* (dir. Neeraj Ghaywan, 2021). Bharti drinks tea out of the steel cup

Neeraj Ghaywan uses serveware and the discriminatory practices around them to express discrimination against Bharti, which is her principal reason for struggle and downfall. The steel cup serves as a symbol of caste-based discrimination toward her. She uses that same caste identity to defeat Priya, who distanced herself from her and her Boss, who wouldn't give her the job she deserved. In her moment of triumph, she uses that same teacup as a symbol of rebellion against her betrayal and her triumph.

Chapter 2 - Food, Love and Loneliness - *The Lunchbox*

Food is almost always shared. Mealtimes provide an opportunity for families, friends, colleagues and communities to come together and connect. Sharing food also becomes an essential act of caring and providing. For example, a mother feeds the baby, parents cook for a young child, children cook for older parents, and partners cook for each other. This basic human/ animal need forms the basis of our primary relationships (family) and profoundly influences our emotions and behaviour. An individual's food habits can be significantly affected by those around them (friends, family, community). Myrte E. Hamburg, Catrin Finkenauer, and Carlo Schuengel discuss this role of food in their article titled "Food for love: the role of food offering in empathic emotion regulation".

"Food is a fundamental human need that influences both physiological and emotional states. As such, the search for and consumption of food has shaped human and animal behaviour. People feel strongly about their individual food preferences and the food culture they were raised in. Eating behaviour goes beyond nutrition and alleviating hunger; family, friends, and cultural heritage shape individual food preferences. Food offering can be used to show affection to loved ones, to show hospitality to strangers, or to adhere to or express religious beliefs". (Hamburg et al., 2014)

Ritesh Batra uses this role played by food as an act of caregiving and an opportunity for connection to convey love, loneliness and connection in his film - "The Lunchbox". The film tells the story of two lonely individuals, Ila and Saajan, meeting and connecting through a wrongly delivered lunchbox. The audience experiences the

lives of these characters and their emotions significantly through food and related activities. I shall analyse a few different scenes in the film, where the director depicts his characters' loneliness and their moments of connection primarily through food.

Mumbai has a unique system of delivering '*dabbas*' (lunchboxes) carried out by a widespread network of '*Dabbawalas*' (Lunchbox-men).

“Every day in Mumbai 5,000 *dabbawalas* (literally translated as "those who carry boxes") distribute a staggering 200,000 home-cooked lunchboxes to the city's workers and students. Giving employment and status to thousands of largely illiterate villagers from Mumbai's hinterland, this co-operative has been in operation since the late nineteenth century. It provides one of the most efficient delivery networks in the world: only one lunch in six million goes astray.” (Roncaglia, 2013)

As Roncaglia explains, they have become very famous for their thoroughly organised and error-free system of working (Roncaglia, 2013). Men leave for work early in the morning to beat the traffic. Their wives at home take a few more hours to cook lunch. A *dabbawala* comes home, takes the lunchbox, and delivers it to the men. These lunch boxes are picked up from homes across the city and delivered to men working in offices across the city. They are known to (almost) never make a mistake.

The lunch boxes are very particular and accommodate all the dishes essential to a traditional Indian lunch. It has four round containers stacked, one on top of the other. One holds '*Sabzi*' (a vegetable preparation with spices), one holds '*Dal*' (lentil curry), one holds '*Chapati*' (Indian flat bread), and one holds rice. This steel lunch box has a thick fabric cover that protects it. The common exchange of lunchboxes happens

between wives and husbands. However, sometimes people have their mothers, domestic help or small restaurants and eateries also prepare these lunch boxes. This system is unique to Mumbai and a key feature of the city. People in Mumbai either engage with the *dabbawalas* for lunch box delivery or, at the very least, cross paths with them, carrying lunch boxes, in trains, in the streets - on foot or on their bicycles. One day a *dabbawala* wrongly delivers a lunchbox from Ila (a housewife with a child in her late 30s) to Saajan (an accountant who is to retire soon in his early 60s), and the two begin talking.

The film begins with a montage of *dabbawalas* who travel across the city, picking up and delivering lunch boxes. We then see Ila, who gets to cooking after sending her daughter off to school. The pressure cooker in which the lentil curry is cooking lets out a whistle. Ila rushes to open it and smells the curry. She tastes a little. The audience can tell from her expression that she is not very happy. A voice of an older woman (offscreen) asks her if she has added everything. Ila replies, saying she is not sure and that she may have forgotten something. Ila rushes to the spice rack to get a jar of spice powder to perfect her lentil curry. The old woman, who Ila affectionately calls Aunty, tells her that she knew something was missing from the aroma from the first whistle of the pressure cooker. Ila is also simultaneously skillfully flipping flatbread from a hot pan with her bare hands - a skill only the most experienced and skilled cooks have. This small gesture is enough to convey to an audience (that has grown up eating flatbread) that Ila is an experienced and skilled cook. The old woman lowers a basket with a jar of spice powder using a rope to reach the window in Ila's kitchen. She asks Ila to use this spice. We understand from this action that the voice is of Ila's neighbour from upstairs. (Aunty is not Ila's relative. Most Indians don't

call older people by their name and use equivalents of 'Aunty', 'Uncle', 'Sister' 'Brother' to refer to older people.)



Image 2.1 - *The Lunchbox* (dir. Ritesh Batra, 2013). Ila is seen receiving spice powder from her neighbour through the window in her kitchen



Image 2.2 - *The Lunchbox* (dir. Ritesh Batra, 2013). The dabbawala is seen parking his bicycle with several different lunch boxes tied to his bicycle.

Just as Ila is supposed to add a spoonful of the spiced powder, Aunty interrupts (almost as if she can see her) and tells her that only a pinch is enough. Ila obeys. Aunty tells Ila that this new recipe will do the magic for Ila. This comment reveals that Aunty knows something intimate about Ila. And that Ila is cooking this meal with some intention. The audience will later find out that Ila's husband has lost interest in Ila, and she is striving to win back his attention and love. Aunty suggests that this lentil curry will reignite the romance in Ila's marriage. Ila giggles. Aunty has predicted her reaction. Aunty tells her that Ila will find out soon. Aunty can smell the lentil curry and comments that it is perfect. She says that one bite and 'he' will build a 'Taj Mahal' for her. ('Taj Mahal' is a historical Indian monument, famous as a symbol of love and romance.) It can be assumed that Aunty is hoping for a big romantic gesture from Ila's husband for Ila. It can also be assumed that Ila is putting in the effort to make this food perfect to impress her husband. Ila comments saying the 'Taj Mahal' is actually a tomb. She returns the spice jar. Ila hears a cycle bell. She looks out the window. She can see a *dabbawala* with multiple lunch boxes attached to the back of the bicycle parking it (image 2.2).

Ila hurriedly starts packing the different dishes in the multiple containers of the lunch box. She empties the lentil curry into one of the containers. From a wok, she takes some 'sabzi' (a vegetable preparation with onions, tomatoes and spices), and she fills the third container with rice. The rice grains look long and separate, which tells the audience that it is cooked perfectly. The doorbell rings. Ila folds the flatbread and puts it in the fourth container. She garnishes the *sabzi* with desiccated coconut. She then stacks all the containers together and locks them shut. She puts the lunchbox in its Teal cover as she rushes towards the door. She dusts the cover before she hands it to the *dabbawala*, who is in a rush. He takes it from her and leaves.

Ila puts a lot of effort into cooking the meal and sending it to her husband. The 'Dabba' system allows her the time and space to prepare an elaborate meal for her husband, who has already left for work and is unaware of what she will be cooking. This adds a surprise element for the receiver (Ila's husband) of the *dabba*, who will receive it and eat it at his office. I shall try and explain the effect this surprise can have from my personal experience. When I was a child, my mother would wake up much before me and prepare a tiffin box for me to take to school. This is unlike a lunch box and would contain a smaller meal - a sandwich, flatbread with jam, or some vegetable curry to be had between breakfast and lunch. My mother would sometimes draw smilies or funny faces with ketchup or lie to me about the contents of the box, only for me to later find out that she had made my favourite snack. These small gestures would always warm my heart. They served as a medium of communication when we were both away during the day. In my opinion, a good surprise meal in a lunchbox does hold power to alleviate someone's mood. Ila is working hard to do that. From Aunty's comments, the audience could assume that Ila

is working to earn her husband's praise and attention, suggesting that maybe she doesn't receive any.

The Teal lunch box travels across the city through all the channels involved in this delivery process. The *dabbawala* rides his bicycle through the rain in the busy streets of Mumbai and hands it to another *dabbawala*, who puts it in a large tray with other lunch boxes that goes into the local train. Some trays are taken out of the train and loaded into another local train. After completing its long journey, the lunch box arrives at Mr Saajan's desk. Saajan is a man who is nearing his retirement. His Boss introduces him to Mr. Sheikh, who has joined as a trainee to replace Saajan after he retires. Saajan doesn't react to compliments from Mr. Sheikh and can't wait to return to his work. He looks grumpy and easily annoyed.

We see Saajan in a wide shot sitting in a crowded canteen (image 2.3). Everyone else has company at their table except Saajan, who is sitting alone at a table for four. He removes the lunchbox out of its fabric cover. He inspects it, turning it and checking by looking at it from different sides. He looks suspicious.

We see Saajan in a medium shot as he opens the lunch box after examining it curiously. He opens it and looks at one container. He seems more curious than before. He smells the dish and takes a few moments to stare at it. He picks a piece of the vegetable and eats it. He chews it slowly. His curiosity looks heightened. He adjusts himself as he prepares to eat the meal. He sets all the containers on the table, taking a moment to look at and smell each container properly. He takes the flatbread and feels it (image 2.4). We see Saajan serving himself the meal in a top shot (it is the meal that Ila had cooked).



Image 2.3 - *The Lunchbox* (dir. Ritesh Batra, 2013) Saajan inspects the lunchbox, sitting alone in a crowded canteen.



Image 2.4 - *The Lunchbox* (dir. Ritesh Batra, 2013). Saajan curiously feels the flatbread.



Image 2.5 - *The Lunchbox* (dir. Ritesh Batra, 2013). Saajan serves himself the meal cooked by Ila.

Saajan's body language and expressions convey his surprise and overwhelm at receiving such an aromatic and delicious meal. The way he gears himself up after taking a small bite of the vegetable to eat the meal suggests that such a delicious meal is not an everyday thing for him. He feels the flatbread, implying that he doesn't commonly eat them this soft. Being a middle-aged, working man, traditionally, the job of cooking for him would be that of his wife. His surprise and overwhelm could be understood as the lack of having this caregiver. The audience could assume that his wife has divorced him, is a terrible cook, is dead, is unwell or doesn't love him or care for him.

He is the only one in that canteen that sits alone and eats alone, thus establishing his lack of connection with anyone there. The only connection he has and the only joy he feels is when he sees, smells and eats this food. The scene gives the audience an insight into what could be Saajan's emotional and marital status.

On his way home, Saajan is seen yelling at some neighbourhood children for playing near his house. He refuses to return their ball to them. Two dinner scenes follow in a single sequence. In the first one, Saajan notices one of the children having dinner with her family, and in the second scene, we see Saajan having dinner.

Saajan is standing on his balcony smoking a cigarette. The light is cold (fluorescent). He looks across the street to see a family eating dinner through their window. The lighting inside their house is warm. There are five people at the table, and there are many dishes - two types of curries, rice, bread and plenty of everything. They pass each other food and talk to each other. A little girl, who Saajan is seen yelling at in a previous scene, is at the table. She sees Saajan looking at her family. She gets up and shuts the window. Saajan is embarrassed and looks away.



Image 2.6 - *The Lunchbox* (dir. Ritesh Batra, 2013) Saajan's neighbor's family dinner.



Image 2.7 - *The Lunchbox* (dir. Ritesh Batra, 2013) Saajan stands alone in the balcony as he watches his neighbors having dinner.



Image 2.8 - *The Lunchbox* (dir. Ritesh Batra, 2013) Saajan pours curry out of a thin polythene bag into a bowl.

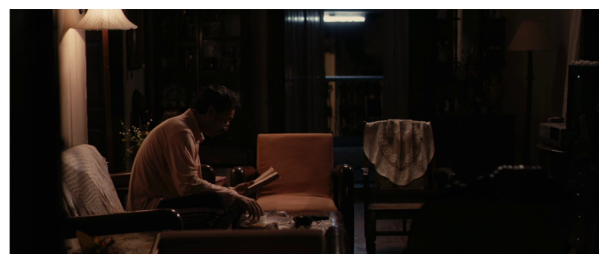


Image 2.9 - *The Lunchbox* (dir. Ritesh Batra, 2013) Saajan eats dinner alone.

The scene at the balcony cuts to a close-up of Saajan opening a thin polythene bag filled with curry. He pours it into a bowl (image 2.8). He removes flatbreads from a

plastic bag and puts them on a plate. The flatbread he removes looks stiff, unlike the one Ila had made. Saajan feels no excitement towards this food. It is common for cheaper restaurants in India to package their food in flimsy polythene bags. This meal is not a luxury or an occasional treat. If it was, Saajan could afford more expensive food working as an accountant. It could be assumed, therefore, that this is the routine. This further establishes that he lacks someone to cook and care for him.

The scene cuts to a wide. Saajan picks up a book as he eats. He is in his living room. He is sitting at the coffee table to eat. He is surrounded by furniture. He only has his book for company which further establishes his loneliness (image 2.9)

The following day, Saajan is again seen sitting alone at a table in a crowded canteen. He opens the lunchbox, removes each container, and places them on the table. He smells a container. He serves himself some curry and flatbread. In the container holding the flatbread, he finds a piece of paper. He opens it. He reaches for his glasses in the chest pocket of his shirt. He hears a giggle in the crowd. He looks around to make sure no one is watching him. He takes the letter and reads it.

The letter reads (in Ila's voiceover) - " Thank you for sending back an empty lunchbox yesterday. I had actually prepared that food for my husband". The scene intercuts with an image of cottage cheese being grated on a grater. The voiceover continues. " When the lunch box came back, I thought my husband would say something to me when he returned home that evening." In a previous scene, when Ila receives the lunchbox from the *dabbawala*, she weighs it and opens it excitedly. She tells her neighbour that it's completely empty. And that it looks like it has been licked. Ila is delighted, and she dresses up before her husband returns home. He doesn't say

anything to her. When Ila asks how the food was, he tells her that the potatoes were good (Ila hadn't cooked potatoes).

The letter continues as we see images of Ila elaborately preparing a red curry with cottage cheese. It reads, "I thought for a few hours that maybe the way to man's heart is truly through his belly. In exchange for those hours [of hope], I am sending you today - '*Paneer*' [a curry with cottage cheese]. My husband's favourite dish".



Image 2.10 - *The Lunchbox* (dir. Ritesh Batra, 2013) Ila makes Paneer curry.

Ila garnishes the curry with cream and serves it in a lunch box container. Ila then asks Aunty if this (the letter) is necessary. Aunty assertively says yes and adds that she must thank him. Ila asks what if it reaches her husband. Aunty tells her that that could also help. He ate someone else's food and didn't even realise it. Ila nods in agreement. She asks Aunty if she should add anything. Aunty says it's best to keep it short.

Ila's letter, her effort in cooking for her husband, her excitement when she receives an empty lunchbox, and her disappointment in not receiving any validation or praise from her husband prove that she is trying to get him to pay attention to her and is failing. She thanks a stranger for making her believe in an age-old saying and giving her hope. Saajan does this by eating the food and fully emptying the lunchbox. If cooking is an act of love, then not finishing/ appreciating a meal could be considered

an act of not appreciating that love. This could be said to be true across cultures but may hold more true in a country like India that puts so much importance and value on food. The excitement Ila feels when she receives an empty lunchbox depicts that her husband probably doesn't always finish a meal, making Ila feel unappreciated and neglected. Therefore she considers receiving an empty lunchbox a sign of appreciation and acceptance, which gives her hope for their relationship.

***Hum Saath Saath Hain* and the Happy Family**

The story centres on a joint family, its values and togetherness, who grow apart after a misunderstanding. A lunch scene in the film depicts food as a medium to express love and care in a happy Indian joint family.

In *Hum Saath Saath Hain*, the director Suraj Barjatya uses a lunch scene to show the love and unity in the family. Prem has come home from the US for his parent's anniversary. The whole family is having a feast for lunch. Prem's sister, who is married, has also come over. Prem's elder and younger brothers (Vivek and Vinod), who live as part of the joint family, are also there. Vivek's wife and a few other friends and relatives are also there for lunch.

In the lunch scene, all the men are seated at the dining table while all the women are happily serving the men. An uncle attending the anniversary lunch declares that a home where the women of the house cook and serve the family is indeed a happy home. Ramkishan, the patriarch of the household, agrees, saying, "a family that prays together, eats together, stays together". The film thus establishes that the role

of care and nourishment is traditionally that of women and a home where this duty is wholeheartedly fulfilled is a happy home.



Image 2.11 - *Hum Saath - Saath Hain* (dir. Suraj Barjatiya, 1999) Mother feeds Vinod Gajar Ka Halwa (dessert).

Mamta, Prem's mother, brings a bowl of '*Gajar ka Halwa*', a high-effort Indian sweet dish (Prem's favourite) and declares that she has made it for him. Prem is about to accept the bowl, but Mamta stops him and goes on to feed him herself. His mother goes beyond just cooking and serving her son but actually feeds him herself. This gesture makes her look like an extremely affectionate mother. The one who doesn't just perform her basic duty (of cooking and serving as expressed in the film) but goes beyond to express love and affection.

The two younger siblings affectionately express jealousy. Sapna (a girl in her early 20s, a family friend's daughter who Vinod has feelings for) brings *Samosas* (an Indian savoury snack) and serves one to Prem. Vinod flirtatiously asks if he can have any. He adds that he prefers salty to sweet. Salty, when applied to a personality in Hindi, does not mean grumpy or irritated as it does in English slang. In Hindi slang, it suggests a fun-loving or mischievous personality. Sapna blushes, serves him all the *Samosas*, and rushes back into the kitchen. This exchange is an example of how food and the slang language around it can be used to express affection and interest in someone.

Lunch is followed by Tea, where the women continue serving the men. It is interesting to note that the women are almost never seen eating in this scene. They are only seen cooking and serving. Preeti (another family friend's daughter who is to marry Prem) arrives with tea and asks if anyone would like some. Vinod declares that Prem will like some tea. Prem declines, but Vinod forces Preeti to serve him. Vinod then tells Prem that he should get used to this as she (Preeti) is going to be serving and feeding him (Prem) for the rest of his life.

Director Suraj Barjatitya uses a lunch scene to establish this family as a big happy family. He does so by showing the women cooking and serving food and the men enjoying the food. Mother cooks and feeds a special sweet to her son to express love. The family friends Preeti and Sapna, who will eventually become the daughters-in-law of this household, are shown to be "good" girls as they help with the cooking and serving. Everyone is shown to be happy and content in whatever roles (cooking, serving, eating) they are playing, thus making them a happy family.

Chapter 3 - Food and the Concept of the “Other” - *Bajrangji Bhaijaan*

Vegetarianism in India is strongly rooted in religion and faith. It is based on the concept of purity and pollution, which forms the basis of the caste system in Hinduism. Prof. Tulasi Srinivas discusses this socio-political-cultural nature and role of food in her article titled “Exploring Indian Culture through Food”. She writes:

“Often upper castes will not eat onions, garlic, or processed food, believing them to violate principles of purity. Some lower-caste Hindus are meat eaters, but beef is forbidden as the cow is deemed sacred, and this purity barrier encompasses the entire caste and religious system.” (Srinivas, 2011)

The Religion Census conducted as part of the Nation Census Survey 2011, India, stated that 79.80% of the Indian population identified as Hindu (Religion Census 2011, n.d.). The concept of purity of deed, as explained in Chapter 1, prevents several upper castes (purer castes) from eating meat or non-vegetarian food. However, these rules differ across castes, regions, and ethnicities. For example, Brahmins (highest caste) are traditionally almost always vegetarian. However, the Brahmin sub-caste (Gaud Saraswat Brahmins) based in my home state of Goa is known as the fish-eating Brahmin community. Kshatriyas (warrior caste) which rank second in the caste hierarchy, are known as a meat-eating community. Certain castes which are lower than the Kshatriyas but generally considered upper castes may be vegetarian. Most Hindus do not eat beef; however, it is a popular meat among certain lower castes (Dalits) and certain regional groups. The rules of purity and pollution also limit caste groups in who they can accept food from and who they

can share it with. Bruckert, in his work titled “The Politicization of Beef and Meat in Contemporary India: Protecting Animals and Alienating Minorities”, explains:

“The impurity associated with animal flesh is a cultural and political construct, developed over many centuries. Brahmins and other groups claiming a high status (such as the Vaishyas) embraced a strict vegetarian diet as a marker of their supposed moral and ritual superiority.” (Bruckert, 2019)

Several Indian communities and individuals have tried to elevate their social status by adapting practices of the upper castes. The upper castes were perceived to be superior primarily due to the purity of their actions and professions. Eating meat is considered an impure deed, and most upper castes are restricted to a vegetarian diet. Lower caste groups sought to elevate their status by adopting a ‘purer’ vegetarian diet. In her article titled “Exploring Indian Culture through Food, ” Prof. Tulasi Srinivas explains the popularity of vegetarianism in India. She writes:

“As many scholars have noted, because of the dominance of Hinduism in India and the striving of many lower-caste people for social mobility through imitation of higher-caste propensities, vegetarianism has evolved as the default diet in the subcontinent. Most meals would be considered complete without meat protein.” (Srinivas, 2011)

Several strict vegetarians (mostly upper caste) will refrain from accepting vegetarian food from non-vegetarians and will refuse to eat at restaurants that also serve non-vegetarian food. In Mumbai (like in other cities), certain housing societies, owned and dominated by specific vegetarian communities, have set rules prohibiting tenants

from cooking non-vegetarian foods. There is a general contention among vegetarians about non-vegetarian food. Cow being considered holy, this contention is more substantial against beef and is present in a majority of the Hindu population. Right-wing Hindu politicians and groups have used this sentiment to instigate and unite Hindus for political reasons against Muslims, the second largest religious group (Religion Census 2011, n.d.), who are generally beef eaters. They have used this sentiment to create an idea of the “other” toward Muslims in India.

In this chapter, we shall analyse scenes from the film “Bajrangi Bhaijaan” directed by Kabir Khan (2015), which uses intolerance and acceptance towards non-vegetarian food to depict the character arch in the film’s protagonist. Pawan, a strictly vegetarian Brahmin man who cannot even stand the aroma of non-vegetarian food, will transform into a more tolerant man, accepting of other diets and religions as expressed through food. We shall also look at examples of how meat eating is used as a tool for character description in some other films.

Pawan (30), a Brahmin (priest caste, highest in the caste hierarchy), a devotee of Lord Hanuman, finds a six-year-old speech-impaired girl who is lost away from home and away from her parents.

After his father's death, Pawan moves to Delhi and lives as a tenant/ guest in his father’s friend’s *haveli*. Social historian Sarah Tillotson defines the vernacular architectural style of the *haveli* as a “distinguishable type of inward-looking courtyard house prevalent in pre-colonial north India” (Tillotson, 1994, as cited in Jaikumar, P. 2017). A lot of these old *havelis* have degraded and are now converted into smaller apartments that are sublet. The owner of the house lives with his tenants. Pawan

lives as one such guest/ tenant in an old *haveli* in Delhi, where he has moved to look for work.

Having found the lost girl, Pawan is stuck with her and tries to find her parents. He brings her with him to the *haveli*. Pawan is convinced that she is a Brahmin by caste based on her light skin colour. Using the same argument, he convinces his landlord that she is a Brahmin and requests him to let her stay. Her speech impairment and inability to write do not help the situation. Pawan is left to solve the mystery of her identity. As the days pass, the two bond, only for Pawan to find that she is a Pakistani Muslim. Pawan, a devout Hindu, struggles to digest this and can't wait to get rid of her. But the evil intentions of the world and his love and care for the little girl push him to take on the responsibility of reuniting the girl with her family in Pakistan at the cost of his own life.

When Pawan first arrives in Delhi to meet his father's friend, he is invited to have lunch with his family. Pawan smells something 'foul' and asks if someone is cooking meat nearby. The landlord tells him of the Muslim family living in a *haveli* nearby and how he has made his own *haveli* strictly vegetarian and does not sublet to people of 'other' faith. Pawan is relieved. This scene depicts the general attitude of intolerance towards other religions and their food preferences and habits that is prevalent in Pawan and his landlord (like several other Indians).

The little girl (who Pawan affectionately calls Munni) is sitting down for lunch with the landlord's son, who is the same age as Munni. The children are made to eat early instead of waiting for the adults who are still at work or running errands. The landlord's son asks Munni who her favourite cricketer is. He names several Indian

cricketers, and Munni just shakes her head. He concludes that Munni doesn't understand anything about cricket and gives up and gets to his lunch. So does Munni. In a top-angle shot, the vegetarian contents of Munni's meal - Rice, *Dal* (lentil curry), and two types of *Sabzi* (vegetables cooked with spices) are served in small bowls on a plate.



Image 3.1 - *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* (dir. Kabir Khan, 2015). Top shot of the contents of Munni's lunch served by Pawan's landlord's family.

Munni is seen in a close-up eating a small spoonful of the lentil curry. Her expressions reveal that she does not like it. She puts the spoon back on the plate and stares at the landlord's son, who is eating comfortably. Her displeasure suggests that this is not food that she likes and maybe is used to. Lentil curry, which is eaten across the country, is a staple dish in India. For an Indian vegetarian, this is everyday food. It is unusual that Munni (assumed to be an Indian, Hindu, Brahmin) doesn't like it. This further suggests that Pawan may be mistaken about her identity.

In a wide shot, Munni is seen bringing her plate to the sink. It is visible that she has left most of the food she was served. She opens the tap to wash her hands, and as she is washing her hands, she smells something. She smiles. She leaves the tap running and walks in the direction of the aroma towards the window. She stands at the window and takes a deep breath to smell the aroma better. Most Indian food is very aromatic, and it is easy to recognise what is being cooked from its aroma. Her

expressions suggest that she recognises and likes the aroma. She has a broad smile on her face. Director Kabir Khan uses this scene to establish that while Munni does not like what she is served at the house where she is eating, there is something outside that she is familiar with and drawn to.

In the following scene, everyone from the *haveli* is looking for Munni. Pawan arrives home with Rasika (Landlord's daughter, Pawan's girlfriend), who had gone shopping for clothes for Munni only to discover that Munni is lost again. The two step out and look for her in the lane outside, calling out her name. Rasika notices something. Rasika calls Pawan. They are both scandalised to see what they do.

On the other side of the window (Pawan's perspective), Munni is revealed in a medium-wide shot eating a leg piece of a chicken. There is an older couple next to her. The woman has pulled a '*dupatta*' (a scarf-like piece of fabric worn by women with several Indian outfits) over her head in a manner typical for Indian Muslim women. The man next to her is wearing a skullcap, thus conveying to the audience that Munni is eating with a Muslim family. The shot cuts to a reaction of Pawan and Rasika as they stand there shocked.



Image 3.2 - *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* (dir. Kabir Khan, 2015). Munni is seen eating chicken with a Muslim family.



Image 3.3 - *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* (dir. Kabir Khan, 2015). Pawan and Rasika are shocked to see Munni eating chicken.

In the following shot, Munni is seen in a close-up, taking a bite of the chicken. Pawan is shocked for two reasons. One is that he assumed that Munni was a Brahmin based on her skin colour, and he is seeing her eating chicken which is something he doesn't approve of. Secondly, rules of purity and pollution limit who people can accept food from. Most conservative, upper caste Hindus would not accept food from a Muslim as they are meat eaters and, most importantly, eat beef. For Pawan, Munni being a Brahmingirl, has committed a sin first by eating non-vegetarian food and secondly by eating at a Muslim household. Either that or he has mistaken her identity.

Pawan pushes open the door and carries Munni out. Munni goes back inside and sits down to eat. In a short fast-motion sequence, the repetitive action of Pawan bringing Munni out of the Muslim household and Munni walking back inside is depicted as a funny fight. The lighthearted music of the scene makes the scene funny instead of serious and grave.

In the following scene, Pawan is at a restaurant where he is sitting with Rasika and Rasika's little brother at one table, and Munni is sitting at another table far from them. The waiter lists all the non-vegetarian items on the menu, and Pawan, who doesn't understand much, asks the waiter to get whatever he feels is suitable for Munni, who is sitting away from them. Pawan and Rasika look repulsed at being there.

It is essential to note that Pawan, a strict vegetarian, has now changed (to a small extent) for the sake of Munni and has entered a non-vegetarian restaurant. The name of the restaurant is 'Chaudhary Dhaba', which translates as Chaudhary's Bistro. Chaudhary is a common Hindu last name. While Pawan is okay having Munni

eat non-vegetarian food, he can't bear to sit at the same table, and he has taken her to a Hindu restaurant.



Image 3.4 - *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* (dir. Kabir Khan, 2015). Pawan, Rasika and her brother sit at one table at a non-vegetarian restaurant. Munni is seen in the background seated at a different table.



Image 3.5 - *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* (dir. Kabir Khan, 2015). Munni is sitting alone at a table at the non-vegetarian restaurant.

He discusses this situation with Rasika, convinced that she is not a Brahmin; Pawan then speculates that maybe she is a Kshatriya (Warrior caste - second in the caste hierarchy) by caste as they can be of light skin colour and are non-vegetarians. Pawan is relieved at this thought (which still maintains Munni high in the caste triangle and of the Hindu religion). He continues to look after her.

Pawan eventually finds out that she is a Muslim and that she is from Pakistan. He is devastated. The landlord is furious at him and asks Pawan to get rid of her as soon as possible. The absence of Munni's documents and political tensions between India and Pakistan prevent Pawan from being able to send her back home legally.

Pawan hands Munni over to a local travel agent who agrees to get her to Pakistan illegally, only for Pawan to find later the agent trying to sell Munni to a local brothel. He decides to take her to her home and her parents personally. Pawan has grown very fond of Munni and has accepted her despite her being a Muslim and a Pakistani (identities which he frowned upon before). Pawan and Munni manage to cross the border and stop to eat at a small local Pakistani restaurant.

Pawan and Munni are seated at a local restaurant. In a top shot, the waiter serves them a stew with vegetables and meat. Munni is seen in a medium shot smiling as she looks at the food. In a medium shot of Pawan, he is seen smiling at seeing Munni smile. He then looks down at his plate. His smile turns to a frown as he looks at the non-vegetarian stew served to him. He calls the waiter and asks him if he can get something “*shakhahari*”, a formal and uncommon word for vegetarian food, which the waiter fails to comprehend. Pawan explains if he can get something with vegetables. The waiter points out that there are vegetables in the stew. He names all the vegetables in the stew. Munni is seen in a medium shot smiling with amusement. Pawan clarifies that he only wants vegetables. The waiter asks what is wrong and if the child (Munni) has a stomach upset. The waiter addresses Munni and politely asks her what is wrong with her. Munni shakes her head to say nothing. Pawan says she is fine. The waiter asks Pawan if he has a stomach upset. Pawan replies, saying no. The waiter asks why then he only wants to eat vegetarian food. Munni is again seen in a medium-shot happily enjoying the stew. Pawan asks the waiter to let Munni’s stew be and to take away the one served to him. He asks the waiter to bring him some tea with flatbread. The conversation establishes the waiter and broadly Pakistanis as largely non-vegetarians. Now it is Pawan’s turn to struggle with food instead of Munni. Pawan, still a devout Hindu, will not eat non-vegetarian food. But he is now tolerant of Munni eating meat at the same table as him and about eating food made and served by a Muslim.

Kabir Khan thus uses food to depict Pawan’s arch in going from being a devout Hindu who cannot stand the aroma of non-vegetarian food and who is scandalised at finding out that Munni is non-vegetarian to being a devout Hindu who still adheres to

his vegetarian diet but is now tolerant towards others eating non-vegetarian food and can sit at the same table. He even eats food cooked by a Muslim now, which he wouldn't before.

Kabir Khan also uses food to express the ideas of intolerance towards Muslims from Hindus (mostly upper caste) in India. When Pawan's ideas and behaviour change, this change is also reflected in his behaviour and tolerance towards food.

***Padmavat* and the Cruel Non-Vegetarians**

Another film which uses food habits to depict the honourability and virtue of characters is "Padmavat" (2018), directed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali. In the opening scene, Jalal-ud-Din Khilji (who later becomes a King), in his introduction shot is seen sitting at his seat half asleep with a large piece of meat half-eaten in his hand. Right next to him, what seems to be a goat is being roasted on fire. Throughout the film, he is shown to be a brutal man who wins the throne of Delhi by betraying the king he was serving. It is interesting to note that a negative character in his opening shot is shown eating a large piece of meat while more meat is being roasted next to him.

Alauddin Khilji (the film's antagonist) is depicted to be even more brutal and savage throughout the film. He engages in adultery on the night of his wedding, mistreats his wife, acts on whims, and lacks honour in battle and warfare. He also comes to power by killing the King he was supposed to serve, his father-in-law. To show off his victory, he brings the severed head of his father-in-law to the court and demands that his wife celebrate this victory by making love to him. He is seen eating lunch in one particular scene (image 3.7). He sits alone at a large table. There is a lot of food placed in front

of him. He uses exaggerated gestures, tearing large pieces of the flatbread and holding it in both his hands instead of letting it rest on the plate. He picks up a large piece of meat and holds it in his palm (instead of with his fingers). He tears the meat of it with his mouth with exaggerated movements. His exaggerated actions and movements, plus the size of the meat portion, give him a beastly quality.



Image 3.6 - *Padmavat* (dir. Sanjay Leela Bhansali, 2018). Jalal-ud-Din Khilji is seen asleep at his seat with a piece of meat in his right hand. Meat being roasted can be seen next to him.



Image 3.7 - *Padmavat* (dir. Sanjay Leela Bhansali, 2018). Alauddin Khilji is seen eating meat for lunch.



Image 3.8 - *Padmavat* (dir. Sanjay Leela Bhansali, 2018). King Ratan Singh has dinner with his wife Queen Padmavati.

The *Rajput* King Ratan Singh is honourable and virtuous. In his article titled “Mughal Rajput Relations”, author Adarsh Saini explains that:

“The term Rajput comes from Rajaputra which means ‘son of a king’ and is identified with numerous Kshatriya or warrior castes in northern and western India. They are famed for their fighting abilities and once ruled numerous Indian princely states.” (Saini, 2020)

King Ratan Singh always follows rules, even when it comes to his enemies. When his teacher commits a crime, he does not kill him as it would bring him dishonour to kill his teacher. When Alauddin comes to his palace and says something that infuriates him, he does not kill him as Alauddin is his guest and is not carrying a weapon. Being a Rajput King, he says, he cannot mistreat his guest and cannot kill a man who does not carry a weapon. Ratan Singh is seen eating dinner in one scene (image 3.8). It is interesting to note the contrast in the depiction of the virtuous protagonist, Ratan Singh, eating a meal and the antagonist Alauddin Khilji eating a meal. King Ratan Singh sits at a low table on a low seat. His wife, Queen Padmavati, fans him as the two discuss politics. There is a large ornate what seems to be a silver plate with several smaller bowls holding different foods. He is seen taking small bites. Although the contents of his plate are not fully visible, he is not seen eating any meat.

It may be interesting to note that King Ratan Singh is a Hindu King belonging to the 'Rajput' caste, which is a subcaste of the warrior caste. The warrior caste is known to be a meat-eating caste; however the director refrains from showing the protagonist eating meat. This may have been in line with the concept of purity of character in relation to food (Vegetarian food as pure) as understood by a large population of the country. Jalal-ud-Din Khilji (a negative character) and the antagonist Alauddin Khilji are Mughal Kings and are Muslims. The brutality of their characters is also reflected in their food scenes in the way they eat meat. The positive Mughal/ Muslim characters, for example, Alauddin's wife, Mehrunissa, who is shown to be a kind woman, a victim of Alauddin's barbarity, is never seen eating a meal. It would have been interesting to see how the director chose to portray the contents of her meal and how she ate it.

***Dangal* - Non-Vegetarian Food as 'Breaking the Rules'**

Dangal tells the story of Mahavir Singh from a small village in Haryana who trains his daughters - Geeta and Babita to become successful wrestlers. In a small conservative village like theirs, people are surprised by Mahavir's decision. In the process of training them, he has to do several things that are unacceptable to people around him. He makes his daughters wear shorts when training, makes them compete with male wrestlers as there are no competitions for women, he cuts their hair short to avoid the hassle of maintenance, and he cooks them chicken to increase their protein intake. All societies and communities have certain unwritten rules and codes of behaviour. For example, in India, any public display of affection is frowned upon and leaves people uncomfortable, while it is completely normal in most western countries. These rules of interaction, clothing, food and other behaviour differ across regions, communities and individuals within India. Mahavir Singh comes from a small village in Haryana where it is unusual for women to cut their hair so short, wear shorts and engage in such physical proximity as required when wrestling. While these behaviours would be considered normal amongst less conservative regions, communities and individuals (for example, in urban areas) in India, it shocks people around Mahavir.

Mahavir's family is vegetarian, and he has to cook chicken in the front yard as his wife won't allow the chicken inside their home. In a scene set outside their house, in the front yard, Mahavir is seen marinating chicken. His nephew is reading aloud a recipe while his daughters are seated nearby. His wife comes out from the kitchen and angrily puts a wok with fried onion on the fire that they have started outside. She warns Mahavir to make sure that the wok is never brought back inside the house.



Image 3.9 - *Dangal* (dir. Nitesh Tiwari, 2016). Mahavir cooks chicken outside his house, in the front yard.



Image 3.10 - *Dangal* (dir. Nitesh Tiwari, 2016). Mahavir serves his daughters chicken. His wife watches with disgust from a distance.

Following his nephew's instructions, Mahavir cooks the chicken. He then serves the chicken to his daughters and his nephew and they eat it. His wife stands far away, watching her daughters in disgust, as they eat the chicken.

This act is a part of many others that leave his family, his community and his villagers scandalised. But it depicts the focus and practicality he shows in training his daughters. He doesn't let what is considered to be taboo by his family and community hold him back. He does not succumb to the norms and expectations of society. For a vegetarian, eating chicken is one such act. It is an act of breaking a norm, disappointing people to be able to pursue dreams and ambitions. It depicts the sacrifices Mahavir and his daughters make to achieve the success that they do.

In the films analysed in this chapter, filmmakers are seen using the taboo attached to non-vegetarian food for diverse dramatic purposes. This taboo is used to express character transformation and acceptance when the character becomes tolerant of others consuming it. It is used to depict an act of overcoming challenges and breaking free from social and religious norms when a vegetarian character cooks and eats chicken. And accompanied by other actions of brutality and lack of morality, it is seen as a sign of impurity of character.

Chapter 4 - Food for Comedic Purpose - 3 idiots

Food has been used for comedic purposes in innumerable films across the world. Indian filmmakers have used several aspects of food unique to India - its spiciness, street food culture, and the rules of Indian hospitality which make hosts force their guests into overeating have been used time and again for comedic purposes.

In a study conducted by Chisato Koike titled "Humour and Food Storytelling in Talk-in-Interaction", Koike analyses different types of food humour that can arise in food storytelling. Koike analyses two main categories of food humour in storytelling. One is based on the character's actions and the second is on the recipient's actions. The first category which discusses what Koike calls 'Ridicule Laughter' and 'Funny Laughter' is especially relevant to films. 'Ridicule Laughter' according to Koike is when the character is ridiculed for poor hygiene or cooking skills. 'Funny Laughter' is when the character does something inappropriate or unusual with reference to food (Koike 2020). In my opinion, the third kind of food humour is when characters are shown overeating. A classic example of this can be seen in the popular American sitcom "Friends" in which one of the lead characters, Joey, is obsessed with food. He is seen finishing a whole Thanksgiving turkey all by himself, serving himself a heap of food at a buffet, and complaining about having to share food. All these moments add humour to those scenes. Another form of food humour would be when food is used not for eating but for a completely different purpose. An example of this would be food fights- as seen in the films *Little Darlings* (1980), and *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) among others, where food is used as a tool or weapon to harm someone.

In this chapter, we shall analyse some scenes from popular Bollywood comedy dramas and see how food in the Indian context is used for comedic purposes. I shall analyse two scenes from a comedy-drama titled “3 Idiots” (2009). In my opinion, the two scenes use different aspects of food (bad hygiene in food preparation, inappropriate behaviour, overeating etc) for comedic purposes. I shall also analyse two more sequences from two other films titled “PK” (2014) and “Delhi Belly” (2011) which use certain aspects of food and lifestyle peculiar to India for comedic purposes.

“3 Idiots” directed by Rajkumar Hirani tells the story of three college friends Farhan, Raju and Rancho. The three get into a lot of trouble with the college dean. After a particular incident, the Dean sends letters to their parents informing them that their sons are causing trouble in college. The three are invited to Farhan’s house and then to Raju’s house to get yelled at. The film is narrated by an older Farhan who is thinking of his college days.

Raju comes from an extremely poor family. In the introduction to the dinner scene (which is also an introduction scene to Raju’s family) Farhan’s voice-over declares that Raju’s home was like one of those from 1950s Bollywood films, a single-room home, with an ill father, a mother who is constantly coughing and an unwed sister. The film becomes black and white with music, reminiscent of 1950s Bollywood films. Farhan’s voiceover explains how the father lost his job and therefore income after he got paralysis, and how Raju’s mother is retired and is always tired. Raju’s home is established where one room is divided into different spaces - kitchen, living area, study area and bedroom. There are no walls or partitions between these spaces. The furniture is broken and the roof leaks constantly. The three - Raju, Farhan and

Rancho are seated on the floor and Raju's mother keeps dinner plates in front of them (image 4.1). The kitchen setup is small and the state of the house reveals their poverty. Raju's mother serves them dinner on steel plates as they are seated on the floor. She then sits by the single stove where she is making fresh flatbread. She tells Raju that his sister has turned twenty-eight and the suitors are asking for a Maruti 800 (a small car) in dowry which Raju's family cannot afford. Raju's mother asks how they will get her married if Raju doesn't study.



Image 4.1 - 3 Idiots (dir. Rajkumar Hirani, 2009) Home and dinner setup

Raju's sister Kammo, serves some Okra to Rancho. Raju's mother asks if Raju knows that Okra is now selling at Rupees 12 a kilo and Cauliflower is selling for Rupees 10 per kilo. She complains about inflation. Raju feels embarrassed. Farhan and Rancho exchange glances awkwardly. Raju's mother complains about the Dean's letter about Raju's behaviour. Kammo asks Rancho if he wants '*Paneer*' curry (curry made with cottage cheese). Rancho says yes. Raju's mother tells Raju that people will soon have to buy '*Paneer*' (cottage cheese) in extremely small portions at the Goldsmith. She compares the prices of Paneer to valuable Gold to over-dramatise the inflation in the country. Kammo offers '*Paneer*' to Farhan and he awkwardly declines. Raju realises and asks his mother to stop. Raju's mother gets emotional. She starts mumbling about how her son doesn't value the hard work she has put in to raise him. She then turns to Raju and asks him who she should discuss her problems with if not her son. She asks sarcastically if she should discuss them

with his friends (something which she has been doing during this dinner). Raju gets irritated and walks out.

Conversations over lunch and dinner are expected to go a certain way especially when guests are being hosted. People usually avoid discussing personal problems or anything that can make the guest feel uncomfortable. A common Indian phrase in the Sanskrit language - "Atithi Devo Bhava" which translates to "Guests are God", forms the basis of Indian hospitality. People put in extra effort to make their guests feel welcome and taken care of. Therefore actions or comments from the host that makes the guest feel awkward and uncomfortable provide an opportunity for drama.

Raju's mother expresses shock about the prices of vegetables which she has cooked for dinner. She complains about inflation and her family's poverty as Rancho and Farhan eat dishes that are fairly expensive and Raju's mother cannot afford. This leaves the two of them feeling guilty and awkward. This awkwardness and lack of awareness from Raju's mother evokes humour. Raju's mother's comparison of the price of Paneer to that of Gold is exaggerated and overdramatic. This exaggeration also adds humour to the scene.

Raju's mother starts crying as Raju leaves the house angrily. Farhan and Rancho are seen in a two-shot just about to have a bite of Paneer and flatbread. They stop as Raju walks out. Farhan's voiceover says that at that moment they were in a dilemma. They didn't know if they should run after their friend or if they should console his mother. He then says that they decided to focus on the Paneer curry. The two - Farhan and Rancho awkwardly exchange glances and in a synchronised motion eat the bite of Paneer and flatbread.

The situation is rather sad and serious. Their friend and his mother have had an argument causing his friend to leave the house angrily and has left his mother to cry. Rancho and Farhan decide to focus on the food instead of their friend or his mother. This choice is innocently greedy and selfish making Rancho and Farhan look flawed but believable and relatable as characters instead of good and possibly dull. This flawed and selfish behaviour makes the scene funny.

Raju's father who is lying in a bed right next to the kitchen set up starts making a noise. Raju's mother takes the rolling pin she uses to roll the flatbread, puts it inside his vest and scratches his chest with it (image 4.2 & 4.3). Farhan and Rancho are seen in a two-shot as they stare in horror. Raju's mother tells them how her husband's eczema cream now costs Rupees 55. She then removes the rolling pin and starts rolling the flatbread.



Image 4.2 - *3 Idiots* (dir. Rajkumar Hirani, 2009) Raju's mother scratching her husband's chest with the rolling pin



Image 4.3 - *3 Idiots* (dir. Rajkumar Hirani, 2009) Raju's mother scratching her husband's chest with the rolling pin

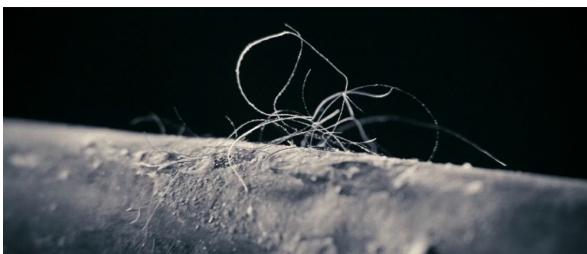


Image 4.4 - *3 Idiots* (dir. Rajkumar Hirani, 2009) Hair stuck to rolling pin



Image 4.5 - *3 Idiots* (dir. Rajkumar Hirani, 2009) Farhan and Rancho feeling horrified and disgusted

In a close-up the audience sees Raju's father's chest hair stuck to the rolling pin (image 4.4) and then the flatbread. Farhan and Rancho in a two-shot look scandalised. Farhan almost throws up (image 4.5) Raju's mother wipes her tears and asks Farhan and Rancho to take more flatbread. Farhan and Raju, completely disgusted, immediately refuse the flatbread saying that they are full, again in a synchronised fashion and leave.

Different individuals, households, and societies have different standards of hygiene. What is someone's routine, may be unacceptable to others. There is a shock factor involved when one sees another doing something that is completely unacceptable to them. Hair in food is probably something that is unacceptable to a majority of people. Raju's mother who is severely overworked and too poor to afford eczema cream, cannot be bothered to care. The casualness with which she uses the rolling pin to scratch her husband and then roll flatbread is shocking to Farhan and Rancho as it would be to most people. The two who have been eating her food are disgusted and cannot bear to have more. The shock of Raju's mother's actions, her casualness, Farhan and Rancho's restrained disgust, and the politeness with which they decline the food, together make the scene extremely humorous.

The three friends, Farhan, Rancho and Raju, leave Raju's house still hungry. Rancho suggests that they eat out. Farhan reminds them that it is the end of the month and they are all broke. Rancho tells them they don't need money to eat; they need uniforms.

In the next scene, they are all seen entering a wedding, wearing turbans (a headgear commonly worn by men at Hindu weddings in North India). A lot of Indian

weddings have hundreds and sometimes thousands of guests. It is easy to move unseen in a crowd that large. This is one such wedding. Rancho, Farhan and Raju confidently enter a wedding to eat free food served at the buffet. The inappropriateness of this act adds humour to this scene.

Rancho, Raju and Farhan sit down at a table (image 4.6). One of the servers is passing with a tray of snacks. Rancho stops him and asks him what they are serving as starters. Before the server answers, Rancho asks him to bring them two plates of everything. Rancho takes the plate of snacks the server is holding from him as Farhan asks him to bring some Vodka. The server awkwardly hands him the plate and goes away. Raju looks around, scared about getting caught.



Image 4.6 - *3 Idiots* (dir. Rajkumar Hirani, 2009) Raju, Rancho and Farhan ordering starters

Director Rajkumar Irani uses what Koike explains to be “Funny Laughter”. Koike explains Funny Laughter is evoked when:

.. story characters’ eating behaviour [is] deemed inappropriate for the occasion, contradictory, or unusual, and in stories about unexpected or extraordinary ingredients in food or dishes in a meal. (Koike 2020)

The food being served at the wedding is for the guests invited to the wedding. Raju, Farhan and Rancho are there without an invitation, only for the food. They are at a place where they are not supposed to be. They are broke and now have access to unlimited food they don't have to pay for. They don't hold back. They order food without restraint in a way to make the best of the opportunity. Rancho and Farhan show no fear of being caught and humiliated. The inappropriateness of their actions and their lack of fear and restraint makes the scene humorous.

While eating, Rancho hears a man (Suhas) yelling at a woman (his fiancée, Piya) for wearing a cheap watch with her outfit. He says it damages his reputation if his fiancée is dressed like this. Rancho goes up to her and offers her what he calls 'free advice'. He tells her that this 'guy' is not a 'guy' but is in fact a 'price tag'. Rancho explains how he will bore her by telling her the price of everything in life. Piya gets irritated at him. Rancho offers to demonstrate his point. He sees a server approaching with snacks and tells Piya that he can find out the price of her fiancée's shoes. Rancho adds that he won't ask, but her fiancée will tell himself. He takes a bowl of *chutney* (a spicy green sauce or dip that is eaten with a lot of Indian snacks) from the server and walks to Suhas. He asks the waiter to follow him. When Rancho is close enough, he spills the *chutney* on Suhas's shoes (image 4.7). Suhas screams " My three hundred dollar shoes! " and yells that they are hand stitched with genuine Italian leather. Rancho comes back to Piya and tells her that she can take his advice or let it be. Piya is left furious.



Image 4.7 - *3 Idiots* (dir. Rajkumar Hirani, 2009) Chutney on Suhas' shoes

The green chutney here is used not as food but as a tool to demonstrate a point. It is used to damage something Suhas believes to be precious. When this damage is caused he starts blurting out the prices of his belongings that have been damaged. Rancho thus proves to Piya how Suhas values “things” more than people. It attempts to make fun of people who are obsessed with luxury items and can be hurt by something as simple as *chutney*.

The green *chutney* is repeatedly used in the film as a “character revealer”. Later in the film, in a song sequence which demonstrates Piya falling in love with Rancho, Piya is shown to see Rancho all around her, in the people around her. Piya is seen watching T.V with her father. Her father changes the channel to a cooking show. The chef looks like Rancho. Piya is shocked. The chef says that they are going to learn how to make ‘*Pudina Chutney*’ (Green *chutney* from mint leaves) today. He adds that the *chutney* can be used to eat and also to understand people’s true character (image 4.8). In another scene, Farhan and Raju want to prevent Piya from marrying Suhas. They decide to delay Suhas from reaching the wedding ceremony. Raju does so, by pretending to be a housekeeping staff and staining Suhas’s wedding outfit with the same green chutney. Piya who believes that Suhas is now a changed man hears him scream out the price of his wedding outfit leading Piya to question her decision of marrying him. This repeated use of the green chutney as a tool used to reveal to Piya, Suhas’s true nature adds humour to the film. *Chutney* is a common,

inexpensive and popular dip and is used in the film for such a serious task. The irony of this situation makes the scenes funny.



Image 4.8 - *3 Idiots* (dir. Rajkumar Hirani, 2009) Rancho as chef

Piya is infuriated at Rancho and goes to her father (the dean of the college, the father of the bride, who is already angry at the three of them) and asks him if they are his guests. The Dean recognises them and wants to kick them out. Piya goes ahead to have some fun.

She walks past the three of them as they are serving themselves dinner. The shot begins on two large containers of food-holding curries. It tilts up with the spoon as Farhan and Rancho serve themselves from those containers. It then pans as Piya walks past Farhan, Rancho and Raju to reveal all three of them serving food (image 4.9). Their plates are over full and they just pile the food on top of more food. Rancho comments that the Chickpea curry looks and smells very good. Farhan complains that there is no space left on his plate for *Puri* (flatbread deep fried in oil), Rancho asks him to adjust it.

It is almost disgusting to see how the three friends have served themselves a heap of food. They serve one curry over another, allowing all the different foods to mix. They discuss how good the food is and how they can fit more in their overfull plates. The overconfidence with which they are serving themselves, and their complete

abandonment about being caught or judged, make the characters and scene humorous.



Image 4.9 - *3 Idiots* (dir. Rajkumar Hirani, 2009) Farhan, Rancho and Raju eating at the wedding buffet

The three get caught by the dean. Turns out it's his daughter's wedding they're crashing and feasting at. They get further into trouble with him.

PK - Food Religion and Confusion

PK is a film about an alien, PK (who looks exactly like a human being) who is left behind on Earth by his ship. He has a device that he uses to communicate with his planet but unfortunately, it gets stolen. PK must learn the ways of living and communication of people from Delhi, to be able to find his device to return back to his planet. When attempts to explain his story to people, people often tell him that only God can help him. He sees religion and God as a service provider that helps people for a small fee (donation) or offering (food/ flowers). India being a country of multiple faiths, PK must learn the several, often contradictory beliefs and practices of people from different religions. The director, Rajkumar Irani explores these differences through various aspects of life; one of them is food offered to God as part of rituals and worship.

Food plays an important part in religious rituals, festivals and worship. Different foods are offered to different Gods as part of ritual and worship in Hinduism. Milk is commonly offered to God *Shiva*; *Modak* (a kind of stuffed sweet) is offered to God *Ganesh*; Coconut is offered and broken (often at the altar) for blessed beginnings or for special prayers; fruits and betel nuts are offered to several deities as part of worship; full cooked meals are offered first to God and then to guests during certain rituals and festivals. Food plays an important part in Hinduism and other Indian religions. Eid-Al-Adha (Bakri Eid) is also a popular Muslim festival in India. Goat is sacrificed as part of the festival and its meat in the form of *Mutton Biryani* and *Mutton Curry* is distributed among friends and relatives. The relevance of Bread and Wine in Christianity is also well known. Certain foods are also unacceptable in certain religions, for example most Hindus consider cows to be holy and refrain from eating beef. Alcohol and pork are known to be considered 'haram' or forbidden in Islam.

A shopkeeper selling coconuts, flowers and incense sticks outside a temple, with the intention of making a sale, convinces PK that he must offer it to the God inside if he wants his help. Coconut is very commonly offered during worship at temples or rituals and is broken at the altar for blessed beginnings and new endeavours. PK listens to the shopkeeper, pays for the coconut, flowers and incense sticks and goes inside the temple.



Image 4.10 - *PK* (dir. Rajkumar Hirani, 2014)
Plate with Coconut, flower and incense sticks
PK takes to the temple.



Image 4.11 - *PK* (dir. Rajkumar Hirani, 2014)
Plate with blessed flowers and blessed broken
coconut he is returned

After waiting in an extremely long queue it is finally his turn to make the offering. He puts money in the donation box and gives the coconut along with the flowers and incense sticks to the priest. He prays that he gets back his device and stands with his hands open. The priest keeps a plate with a broken coconut (to be eaten as blessed food) and flowers. PK who was expecting to receive his device is disappointed and screams asking for it. He is kicked out by the temple authorities.

When he complains about God to a police officer for accepting fees and not delivering his device, the police officer thinks he is drunk. He checks for his ID proof and finds a visiting card that reads 'Ruby D'Mello', a name he identifies as a Catholic name. He asks PK to go to a Church and ask Jesus for help.

In the following scene, PK is seen entering a Roman Catholic Church with a plate full of coconut, flowers, incense sticks and other things unaware that those are offerings made to Hindu Gods. He takes off his footwear, as is mandatory at Hindu temples and walks towards the altar. As he walks, people in the church are seen staring at him. The choir is singing a hymn with dramatic music that adds tension as PK gets closer to the altar. The singers stop singing when PK reaches the altar. The music then changes to a composition of temple bells ringing, the conch being blown and other instruments that are played at Hindu temples. PK is seen in a mid shot as he takes some money and holds it in a manner showing the statue of Jesus as he puts it in the donation box. He raises his hand with the coconut to break it at the altar. The audience sees the reactions of several people at the church who watch in horror. PK raises his hand further and just as he lowers it, the shot cuts abruptly to an exterior

shot of the church and a loud noise (of coconut breaking) is heard and crows and birds sitting on the church building are seen flying away.



Image 4.12 - *PK* (dir. Rajkumar Hirani, 2014)
PK entering a Church with a plate with coconut, incense stick, holy thread, lamp and other offerings



Image 4.13 - *PK* (dir. Rajkumar Hirani, 2014)
PK about to break the coconut. People in the Church are horrified.

PK is seen being pushed out of the Church by two men in suits. They abuse PK for behaving inappropriately. Before PK leaves, he notices the priest holding a chalice. He asks a man what is in the chalice and the man tells him that it is wine. PK concludes that God is bored of drinking coconut water and prefers to drink wine now.



Image 4.14 - *PK* (dir. Rajkumar Hirani, 2014)
Priest holding chalice with wine

PK buys two bottles of wine. He enters an alley with the bottles. He stops to ask a man if there is a 'house of God' nearby. The man points him in a direction. PK is seen in a medium shot looking in that direction. The shot cuts to a wide shot of a Mosque. PK is seen walking towards the Mosque with the wine. The bottle of wine is seen in a medium close-up with the Mosque visible in the background (image 4.15). It is commonly known that alcohol is considered 'haram' or forbidden by God in Islam.

This shot connects this inappropriate combination - wine and the Mosque adding drama to the scene. PK's misunderstanding and complete misapplication of what food is acceptable to God make the scene dramatic and funny. People in the street are seen staring at him in horror. The scene evokes what Koike calls 'Funny Laughter' (Koike, 2020) as PK is carrying the wrong thing to the wrong place.



Image 4.15 - *PK* (dir. Rajkumar Hirani, 2014)
PK carrying wine to the mosque

Two men in skullcaps see this and stop PK outside the Mosque. They ask him what is in his hand. PK is seen in a medium shot framed between the two men (image 4.16). PK explains that it is wine. He lifts the two bottles up to his face, now framing himself between the two men and the two bottles of wine (image 4.17).



Image 4.16 - *PK* (dir. Rajkumar Hirani, 2014),
PK being questioned outside the mosque.



Image 4.17 - *PK* (dir. Rajkumar Hirani, 2014)
PK proudly shows his wine bottles.

PK adds that it is for God as casually asks "Where is he?".



Image 4.18 - *PK* (dir. Rajkumar Hirani, 2014)
PK runs away from the mob

In the next shot, PK is seen running away from a mob of angry Muslim men running behind him. PK's innocence, ingenuity and complete ignorance towards the gravity of the situation accompanied by light-hearted background music make the scene funny instead of stressful.

***Delhi Belly* - City, Food and Hygiene**

Another film which has an extremely funny scene written around food is *Delhi Belly*. 'Delhi Belly' is commonly understood as an upset stomach often accompanied by nausea and diarrhoea experienced by travellers in India who are not accustomed to Indian food and water.

Street food in India is popular for its taste and unpopular for its hygiene standards. Several of these street food carts are temporary, mobile and illegal which is why it is difficult for government authorities to monitor hygiene standards. Director Abhinay Deo uses this disgust associated with unhygienic food to add humour to the scene.

The film tells the story of three bachelors who live as roommates in a dilapidating shabby apartment in Delhi. One of them, Nitin who works as a photographer decides to photograph his landlord with a sex worker to avoid paying rent.



Image 4.19 - *Delhi Belly* (dir. Abhinay Deo, 2011) Chicken being fried

Nitin is seen riding his scooter on a busy road in Delhi. In a top shot, the audience sees a large wok filled with boiling oil. A hand lowers a bright red, marinated piece of chicken thigh (image 4.19). In a wide shot, the audience sees a narrow crowded lane. In one corner of the frame, a man is seen frying chicken (same as in the previous shot) and Nitin is seen parking his scooter. Nitin asks the man for a piece of chicken. In a medium close-up, the fried chicken vendor is seen scratching his crotch (image 4.20) and with the same hand reaching for a piece of chicken (image 4.21) and packing it in a newspaper.



Image 4.20 - *Delhi Belly* (dir. Abhinay Deo, 2011) Man scratching his crotch with his hand.



Image 4.21 - *Delhi Belly* (dir. Abhinay Deo, 2011) Man touching chicken with the same hand.

Nitin asks him to add some more spices. The vendor uses the same hand to pick some spices and sprinkle them on the chicken. Nitin takes the chicken and walks away. A man touching food after scratching his crotch is a horrifying image. Nitin is unaware of this but the audience isn't. Imagining that Nitin is going to eat that piece of chicken evokes disgust and through that evokes what Koike calls "Ridicule Laughter" (Koike, 2020).

Nitin, with the chicken in one hand, is seen entering a brothel. He sets up his camera in one room, looking at the room on the opposite side. His landlord arrives there. Nitin photographs his landlord with a sex worker, as he enjoys the piece of chicken.

Nitin leaves after the landlord and pays the sex worker before leaving. He reaches his scooter. He is seen feeling uncomfortable and touches his belly. He walks his scooter to the main road. In the foreground, a man is seen frying '*Jalebi*' (Indian sweet). Nitin looks at it yearningly but is immediately interrupted by stomach pain. He is seen squirming with pain. He starts his scooter and takes off.

The humour in the scene is elevated as Nitin has not only eaten something unhealthy but will now have to bear the consequences. Nitin is seen uncomfortably riding his scooter through the city. He arrives outside his house and drops the scooter on the road instead of parking it and runs inside. He drops his bag and enters the toilet. The audience hears loud noises of farts. Nitin is seen in a close-up, sweating as he continues to fart and defecate.

Nitin reaches for the tap and turns it on. But there is no water (Indians use water instead of toilet paper to wash themselves after defecating.). In a previous scene, it is established that their apartment only gets water early in the morning and often they are too lazy to fill their tank and buckets. This is one such day. There is no water in the apartment. With his pants dropped above his feet, Nitin walks to the bathroom to check if there is any water in the bucket but there isn't any. He goes up to the kitchen and looks for water but there isn't any. In a medium shot from inside the refrigerator, Nitin is seen opening it and looking for water. There isn't any. He turns to leave but

stops. He looks at the packs of orange juice sitting in the fridge (image 4.22). Nitin has an idea.



Image 4.22 - *Delhi Belly* (dir. Abhinay Deo, 2011) Nitin finds orange juice

The shot suggests that Nitin is going to use the orange juice to wash his butt. Food (orange juice) is not used for its original purpose (of drinking) but instead is used for something extremely disgusting. Director Abhinay Deo uses the limited hours of water in urban areas, to push his characters to use a beverage in place of water. This makes Nitin look extremely lazy and disgustingly creative. This evokes humour.

Conclusion

This chapter will conclude the thesis by summarising the key findings in relation to the research aims and research questions, as well as the value and contribution thereof. It will also review the limitations of the study and propose opportunities for future research.

The rich diversity in India's food and associated behaviours, beliefs, practices, rituals, and actions provides an ocean of opportunity for filmmakers to present characters, their identities, emotions and relationships. Indian films would indeed starve without food scenes. The study asserts that the mise-en-scene of a scene is significantly dependent on the character's identity. Filmmakers use food scenes to further convey to the audience these identities and the emotions/behaviours associated with them. For example in "Geeli Puchhci" (analysed in chapter 1 - "Food and Conflict"), it is established that Bharti belongs to Dalit (Untouchable) caste. It is reflected in the steel cup she is offered (a discriminatory gesture) by Priya's (Brahmin) family, while everyone else is offered ceramic cups. In "Bajrangi Bhaijan" (analysed in chapter 3), it is established that Pawan is a devout Hindu. This identity is expanded upon when he reacts negatively to the smell of non-vegetarian meat being cooked.

Food scenes are not just efficiently used in the Indian context to convey information but also to evoke emotions. In the film "The Lunchbox" (analysed in Chapter 2) the audience sees Ila putting in the effort to prepare a delicious lunch for her husband. The blocking, and shot sizes of the following scene, where Saajan is eating the food, accompanied by the actor Irfaan Khan's performance, convey his surprise and overwhelm. Small gestures like feeling the flatbread and smelling the vegetable

expand on his emotion. In the film “3 Idiots” (analysed in chapter 4), the close-up of hair stuck to flatbread which is immediately followed by a two-shot of Farhan and Rancho’s reaction, conveys their disgust and evokes the same feeling of disgust (humorously) in the audience.

Food and associated practices can also be powerful tools to depict relationships, their nature and dynamics. In “Bajrangi Bhaijan”, Pawan, a devout Hindu, who cannot stand the smell of meat being cooked in the neighbourhood, is seen sharing a table with Munni as she eats meat. This transformation is made possible by the bond he develops with Munni as he begins to fully accept her for who she is (Muslim and non-vegetarian). The change in Pawan’s perspective and their relationship is reflected through his tolerance toward “other” foods.

The study helps to understand how minute details of characters’ identities can be conveyed through food. Meal eating as a social activity allows a filmmaker to bring together his/her/their characters and have them interact and express emotions through food. Food and related activities are also political in nature and can reflect characters’ ideas, and beliefs and those of the filmmaker as well. The diverse ways in which vegetarianism and meat-eating is portrayed in films (as studied in chapter 3) bears testimony to this. The contrast in the portrayal of women cooking during a celebration/ party in “Juice” (Chapter 1) and in “Hum Saath Saath Hain” (Chapter 2) also further proves this. The study makes the reader aware of the political nature of food portrayed in films to enable a more sensitive and informed approach to food scenes.

While an analysis of the semiotics of the act of consuming a meal and related activities can convey a lot of information about characters, their emotions and relationships, the study also helps to understand that this depiction is supported and strengthened by aspects of filmmaking (editing, blocking, shot sizes, props, performances, music etc.) which help in establishing the tone of the scene. The scene in “PK”, where PK carries a bottle of wine to the Mosque, could be a serious and tragic one. But the background music, the performance, the blocking and the editing make the scene humorous.

Limitations of study

The thesis is significantly based on my personal knowledge and understanding of food and associated practices, rituals and behaviours and their meanings. This knowledge and understanding are based on my familiarity with India’s cultural contexts as someone born and raised here and has lived here for a better part of my life. I do not claim any in-depth knowledge of food and culture, the lack of which has perhaps prevented me from noticing more details embedded in the films.

The primary limitation of this dissertation is the small size of samples analysed. A larger pool of samples would enable a much deeper and wider look into how food is used in Indian films for dramatic purposes. Moreover, the filmography analysed only includes Hindi language films and is not entirely representative of India as a whole. Regional films in regional languages may provide unique examples and insights into how food is used in Indian films. A deeper and broader study with a more diverse pool of samples will allow us to fully explore the potential of food scenes in Indian

Cinema. Food is a potent tool of communication and its informed and effective use can provide diverse opportunities for drama.

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