

Cultural Transmission through Culinary Practices

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Cultural Transmission through Culinary Practices

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Abstract

Food is an intrinsic part of human life. Apart from being a source of survival, food serves the purpose of conjugating people from different cultural backgrounds. In a fast paced world, where there is no time to spare, meal time offers great time to communicate and *to break bread with* one's family members and associates. Food is an articulation of love and often consorted with hospitality making it a core of many traditions. The alimentary preference of an individual divulges his/her cultural background and in turn communal cultural heritage. Food is a powerful instrument that aids the immigrants in preserving their cultural identity and enables them to attain a place in their new nation. The dietary constituents, preparatory method, choice of food is distinct for distinct cultures. In a cross cultural society, there is a high chance of amalgamation of culinary practices, like the recent mushrooming of multiple multicultural cuisines, which can result in a commingling of multiple cultures. This paper is an attempt to examine the extent to which food functions as a tool for cultural transmission.

Keywords: food culture, culinary practices, immigration, cultural transmission

1.Introduction

Culture is a cumulative set of basic values and premises, aspects to life, beliefs, ideas, courses, cuisines, language system and behavioral conventions partook by a range of people. Besides being a way of life, culture reflects an individual's erudite, amassed experiences that are socially conducted, or behavior acquired by social erudition. Comprising of both explicit and implicit criteria and behavior, both attained and transmitted by symbols, forges culture as a symbolic communication. It is the social institutions that mold and preserve explication of these symbols. Generally, culture doesn't have any genetic roots but is the acquired way of conduct of a class of people and is transmitted like tradition from posterity to posterity. It differs members or groups of people from one another as per the cumulative scheduling of mind. Unlike tradition, culture doesn't follow any static condition but is depended on fluctuating social dynamics.

Human culture in its rudimentary sense is very much intricate. There is a plethora of cultures globally with respect to their socio-economic environmental framework. There exists a growing fad for enculturation at intercultural level across the board. This cultural acquisition and transmission happens through imitation, indoctrination or formal training and conditioning. It is this variegated cultural knowledge acquired and transmitted through disparate mediums and levels of cultural acquisition and transmission that delineates the complexity of human culture in explicit.

Food is one among the fundamental elements constituting culture. In simple words, food refers to any substance that supplies the body with nourishment essential for survival. Above this basic definition, food has many higher purposes to serve. From the primordial ages itself humans tend to have an emotional affinity towards food and its constituents. One's food habits or choices speaks about one's self identity as reflected in the proverbial aphorism "You are what you eat ". This is something unique to humankind. Food is like the representation of cultural nationalism which in turn represents the cultural diversity of the country." Food and its consumption processes are ways of explaining a culture's rooted ethnic identity" (Lal, Nair, Das KV 2020). This utmost significance food has in our culture made food studies an integral and inevitable part of cultural studies. Food studies explore the intrinsic relationship that exists between food and its consumer. As American journalist and non-fiction writer Mark Kurlansky (2002) remarked, "Food is a central activity of mankind and one of the most significant trademarks of a culture ", food stipulates the exploration of culture. Not to forget the curry

culture of British and William Makepeace Thackeray's obsession which took a literary form in the ode, *Poem to Curry*.

Being a country known for its cultural diversity, Indian culinary system is already in hold of a wide range of miscellaneous flavors and regional cuisines. This already diversified Indian cuisine got more enriched by the country's long history of interactions with the outside world and its multifarious cultures. The Mughal, Persian, Portuguese, French, Dutch, British and many more who came in contact with the nation, supplemented its food practices and made a persistent effect on it. Even after they left, their authentic cuisine is still very much in practice in certain regions of the country like the French one in Puducherry, Anglo Indian cuisine which to its most part British and Goan cuisine which is the product of Portuguese colonization. Similar is the case of Daman and Dui which got enhanced by the quirky and synthesized blunge cuisines of Portugal. Foreign influence found its place even in the country's celebrations, like cakes for birthday celebrations, *gulab jamun* as Diwali desert and presence of *pulao* and *biryani* in family functions. Tea or its *desi* version *chai* and its partner biscuit or cookies, consuming which, has nowadays become the cultural identity of Indians is not indigenous to the country. This rejuvenating drink along with coffee which invigorates the Indian minds is the contribution of British colonialism. From time immemorial, Indian society, with open arms has accepted and greatly influenced cultures in a global spectrum.

This paper is an attempt to explore how and to what extent food serves the purpose of cultural transmission and acculturation in a society and also assess the choice of food.

2. Survey and Results

In order to support the statements that are proposed in this paper, we have employed a qualitative approach where in the research problem is tested using statistical evidence from the native Keralites belonging to the age group 16-55 sample analysis. We have passed on a questionnaire, highlighting the objective of the paper via google form. The following are the major observations and analysis as per the collected data.

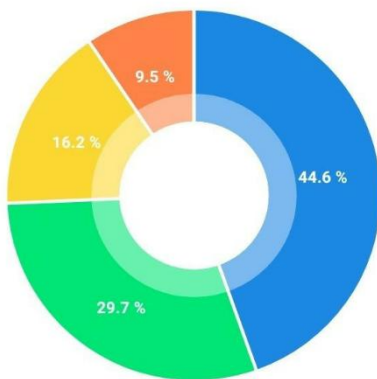
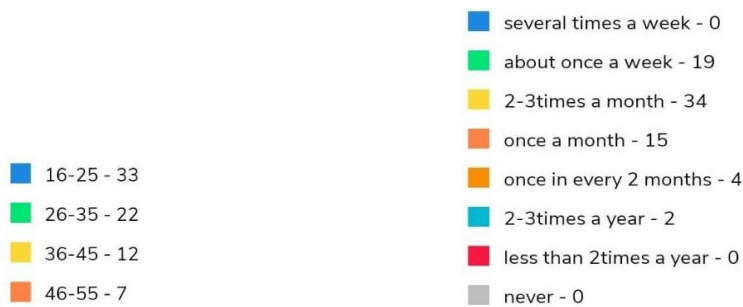


Figure 1: Age group

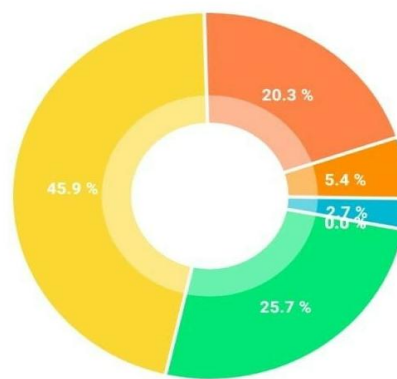


Figure 2: How often do you visit restaurants?

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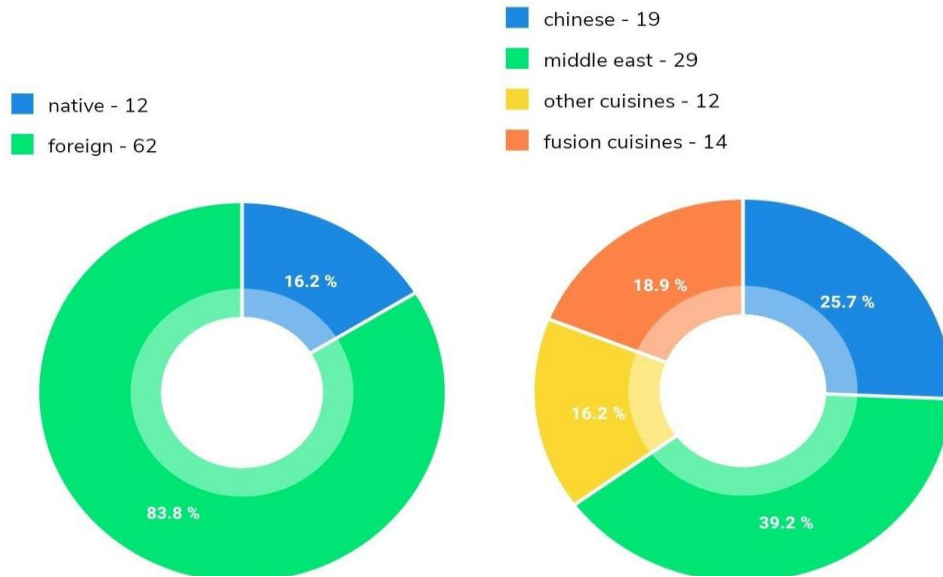


Figure 3: Which type of food do you prefer? Figure 4: Choose your favorite cuisine

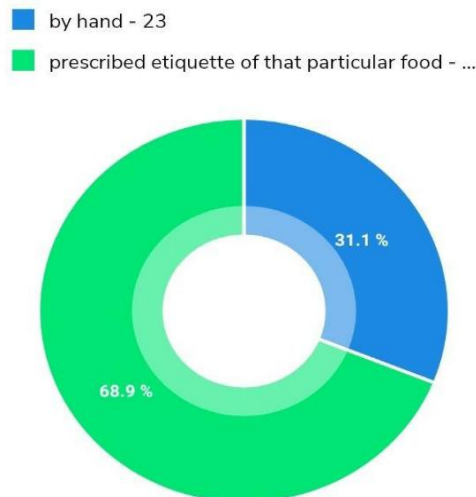


Figure 5: Which way of eating do you follow?

Out of the 74 responses that we have received, the majority belonged to the age group 16-25 constituting 44.59% of the total and the minority of responses were received from the age group 46-55 making it a 9.46% out of the whole.

From the data given in Figure 2, 45.9% of them visit restaurants too often, that is, 2- 3 times a month and 25.7% of them visit a restaurant once a week, 20.3% visit once a month and a very few visit 2-3 times a year.

From this data (Figure 3), we inferred that the majority (83.8%) of them preferred foreign cuisine and 16.2% preferred their native food. Further analysis shows that 96.9% of the members of age group 16-25 have interest in foreign food from which one can interpret the depth of foreign influence in the younger generation. This might have been due to their exposure to a global platform from a younger age itself through various mediums including digital media. Films and literature also inspire them to explore the culture and cuisines that has mesmerized them. Notable interest in foreign food is shown also by 82% of the next age group as well. Among the members of the age group 36-45, 75% of them have an interest in foreign food whereas only a few among the last age group have chosen foreign food. There is a tendency for culture getting transmitted through food practices, which is present at least in a part of the population. The ballooning industry of restaurants that exclusively serve foreign cuisines in the country points to that possibility.

We asked them to choose their favorite cuisine (Figure 4); Chinese, Middle East, other cuisines and fusion cuisines. Of which the majority (39.2%) chose Middle Eastern food, 25.7% opted for Chinese, 19.9% chose Fusion cuisines and

16.2% chose other cuisines. The 39.2% include 36% of the members of the first age group, 45% of the second age group, 50% of the third age group and 14% of the last age group. Chinese cuisines are chosen by 33.3% of the members of the first age group, 27% of the second, 16% of the third and 14% of the last group respectively. Fusion cuisines are of a greater interest for the members of first age group comprising 30.3%

Of all the four options provided, the majority has chosen Middle Eastern cuisines. In this survey most of the subjects belong to the state Kerala. The state possesses an extremely heterogeneous culture. The religious liberalization and the Gulf Boom, which alludes to the profuse migration of Keralites to the Middle Eastern provinces, resulted in proliferated cultural exchange between these two places including embracing their culinary practices. Analysis reveals that most of the people preferred Middle Eastern food (39.2%) than any other cuisine. Owing to the fact that the majority of the participants are Keralites, and the burgeoning demand and flourishing of restaurants featuring Arabic cuisine in the state, prove that there is indeed a certain intensity of cultural transmission happening through food among Keralites. "...Oman's own shawarma, mandi, *makboos*, *falafil*, *khubuz*, *hummous*, *fattoush*, *tabouleh*, *kabsa*, *maqlooba* and saffron rice have become an inevitable delicacy for special occasions... The love for Arabic foods have reached greater heights in places like Malabar region of Kerala, where *mandi* has replaced the traditional biryani in many weddings and festive occasions" (Yousuf K 2018). The popularity of the Arab cuisine in Malabar region, where there is a significant amount of Muslim population can be connected to the cultural origin they claim to. This analysis of food culture invariably points out to the statement of Ashley Bob (2004): "the psychological dimension of hegemony-the way in which a successful hegemonic system must be internalized by the subordinate subject so that it becomes the part of their identity"

Next to Middle Eastern cuisine is Chinese (25.7%). It comprises 33.3% of the people from the first age group, 27% from the second, 16% from the third and 14% from the last age group. Chinese taste has always savored the Indian mouths. Apart from the influence of immigration and trade ties, the familiarity that rose through the rice and gravy bases makes Chinese food an ideal version of the captivating combination of exotic and familiar for the natives.

Fusion cuisines or as some say, the 'confusion cuisine' an innovative face of culinary practice, which is the product of amalgamation of various culinary traditions from different countries, results in cultural intermingling. More than merely a technique that tends the taste buds, it aids in shaping and broadening one's perceptions. Despite severe disparities and hatred prevailing among nations or even the ones with mismatching ideologies, this collaboration in food might pave the way for the linking of culture by framing a culture bond between them. The popularity of fusion cuisines has reached such a degree that, nowadays most of the authentic food is replaced by its modified fusion form. Fusion cuisine molded the mentality of people to accept a multicultural way of life. Here, Fusion cuisines are opted by 19.9%, mostly by the age group 16-25 (30.3%), indicating that this form is trending and emerging to be the top choice for the millennial. This shows the broad mind of the younger population to experiment and to give a chance for cultural intermingling. They view food as a means to familiarize with a culture that is foreign to them and fusion food provides them with that opportunity. They, being the future generation, the fusion cuisine will definitely reach the top point in the near future itself.

We inquired about the eating way they follow (Figure 5) and gave them two options: by hand or by the preferred etiquette of that particular food cuisine. Majority of them constituting 68.9% chose their preferred etiquette whereas the rest constituting 31.1% opted for 'by hand'.

It is primarily in Indian table etiquettes; the influence of foreign contact is more considerably visible. The traditional way of dining is quite different from the one which is now in practice. More and more table manners from western culture were added and that modified the whole dining practices of Indian subcontinent. Kitchen floor was replaced by vast dining tables and western cutlery and utensils took the place of traditional *thali* and banana leaf. Typical occidental cutleries like fork and knife nowadays find a place in the tables. But the majority of the population still continue to eat with washed hands without using any cutlery, major reason being the texture of Indian food. The survey once again indicates this changing scenario in Indian cultural front.

Finally, we asked them "After eating any foreign food, have you felt the need to know more about other traditional cuisines of that culture and its etiquette?" "for which the received data infers that 70.3% of them felt the need to know about other traditional cuisines of that culture and its etiquette whereas 29.7% never felt it. Out of 70.3%, the majority, 44.2%, were interested to know more about Middle Eastern traditional food and 34.6% of them showed an interest in knowing about Chinese one. A few of them showed interest in exploring the traditional food of the countries like France, Mexico etc.

Indians are versatile to discrete culture. "India's understanding of its own cultures and its complex historical and contemporary relations with foreign cultures are deeply evident in public conceptualizations of food as well as in culinary and gastronomic choices and lifestyles" (Srinivas T 2020). They always prefer to experiment with a new form from time to time. Food is one of the foremost things that grab attention in this matter. Different forms of cuisines have continued to be welcomed into this society. Some of them got widely popular due to its striking similarity with the native tastes and tolerance to the Indian digestive system. So the distinct cuisines from every nook and corner are readily available in the

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country. From Chinese, Thai, French, Italian, various Middle Eastern and Mediterranean to some of the world's unique cuisines has found a place in the menus of Indian eateries.

3. Conclusion

Food is an intrinsic part of a culture and the vivifying part of life; it can make a predominant influence on life and its decisions." Culinary culture is an important marker of identity in all societies, as what we eat is an implication of our culture and values" (Suresh Y 2021). Perpetual adherence to foreign cuisines and the curiosity to explore their culture might introduce us to a new way of living and in the long run this might prompt acculturation as well. As the survey suggests, there are many instances where food choices tend people to adopt a new lifestyle like the dining etiquette. That being said, Indian cuisine which is accredited for its diverse vegetarian culinary practices has enticed vegans across the globe. Globalization has brought about a drastic change in the culinary system, thereby profoundly influencing the culture as a whole. As an example, in the Indian scenario, the country's cuisine has showcased a substantial change after its commingling with foreign cultures especially through invasions and colonization. It has paved the way for the cultural integration of the country with the world that has resulted in the embellishment of Indian cuisines in general. Immigration and diasporic intervention has given rise to the alteration in the outlook of people towards their traditional meals, tantalizing them to replace their formal meals with the foreign ones. By discerning distinct culinary practices across diverse cultures, discrete messages and themes are induced from different cultures.

Thus it can be concluded that food plays a pivotal role in cultural transmission.

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