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FOOD AND CULTURE: THE CASE OF MAPPILA MUSLIMS OF MALABAR

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In their introduction to *FOOD and CULTURE; A Reader* Carole Counihan and P V Esterik remarked: "food is life and life can be studied and understood through food"¹. As we know that food is a basic necessity for human existence and is also one of the sources of his highest happiness. This is rightly pointed out by George Bernard Shaw when he said "there is no more sincere love than the love of food"². It is this love of food that makes men to build new social relationship and power structures. It is a fact that there is nothing in this world which is not touched by the food in one way or the other whether it is a household economy or political strategies of state, social differences, bonds, contradictions etc. These aspects of food have been vividly presented in Warren Belasco's *Food: The Key Concepts*³. Similarly E. N Anderson's *Everyone Eats: Understanding food and Culture* presents food from its symbolic character. How various cuisines reveal and shape social relations and connect the past with present concerns and future possibilities is the focus of Jane Dusselier's work on food as culture⁴. As Margaret Visser says a change of diet will change the culture.⁵ No doubt, Food is a lens through which we understand the vast and diverse aspects of various human cultures.

Culture is defined as the beliefs, values, and attitudes practiced and accepted by members of a group and community⁶. Food practices provide cultural criteria in assigning cultural identity to a certain social section in the society. Hence food is not simply related to taste and hunger, it provides a decisive criterion for the construction of a cultural identity⁷. Culturally speaking, what one eats defines who one is and is not. The famous saying is true to its spirit "You Are What You Eat". Of course food is a part of culture. Symbolic representation of diverse social activities associated with food helps to convey the peculiar features of various cultures. As a centre of human life and activities, food influences their tradition, customs and ceremonies. People's language, religion, social economic activities etc. Play an influential role in their culture. Food is one among those factors which shapes the

society. This role of food with its physical, spiritual, social and cultural aspects is discussed in the famous work *A Cultural History of Food*⁸. If we consider food as a cultural product as in Cultural Studies, we will be able to grasp the hidden meanings of social relationships. This aspect of food is very well presented by Jane Dusselier when she wrote about how America's taste for candy was culturally constructed⁹. Similarly Bob Ashly writes about how richly symbolic language of dislike has been constructed around pig on which European culture is actually founded¹⁰. In Kerala, Malabar Mappila's food is actually the result of historical and cultural reasons. For example, in Kerala, certain food items like Kanji or porridge and Tapioca (kappa or Poola) have different word meanings. Kanji or rice gruel, is a kind rice porridge, popular among Malayalees but this word has also been used to denote a good for nothing person. Tapioca is popular in central Kerala and in the higher lands and is frequently eaten with fish curry by the keralites. In Malabar Tapioca is called as Poola which is a vulgar word in the south part of Kerala denoting the female sexual organ. An explorations to these words through Saussurian Semiotics will help us understand how meaning is produced through food¹¹.

The close affinity between the food and culture in various societies is highly visible in their beliefs, religious practices and other cultural activities. This aspect is clearly expressed by Moran when he said that each community is believed of having its own uniqueness and identity of food practices which portray a society's system of beliefs and ideals¹². It is true that every marriage, festivals and other celebrations represent the local community and their religious belief systems. That is why Christopher Murphy in his work *Piety and Honor* says that food in the feasts or celebrations symbolizes values and brings important meaning for religion, cultures and ethnicity¹³. Hence a region's food is actually a testimony of its general character through which one can also understand the life and conditions of a region¹⁴.

Every society has its own ways of taking food. People having diverse cultural tradition eat different food. There is difference in the way people prepare food and consume food, and more larger difference is visible in the ingredients used for cooking various items among societies. If we take the case of *Parotta*, a common menu item in Kerala, the preparation, the ingredients, and the way it is consumed are different across India. As Peter Atkins says "Cooking is a moral process, transferring raw matter from nature to the state of 'culture' and thereby taming and domesticating it. Food is, therefore, 'civilized' by cooking, not simply at the level of practice, but at the level of imagination"¹⁵.

The way how cooking matters in Indian society is evident in the census data of 2011. Government of India considers a household as usually a group of persons who normally live together and take their meals from a common kitchen/ common cooking unless the exigencies of work prevent any of them from doing so. It is also said that if a group of unrelated person live in a census house and do not take their meals from the common kitchen or common cooking, then they will not collectively constitute a household¹⁶. So here too cooking is very important for considering a person's family status. In fact food stands as a metonym for the family and marks family roles and relationships in a material form¹⁷.

Food brings fame and honour to certain regions and the inhabitants. Thalasseri a north Kerala town that is famous across Kerala, for its Biryani. Biryani for Thalasseri is like what is pizza to Italy. This connection between people and place are forged, maintained and contested through multiple cultural practices, including many food related practices¹⁸. This relationship between food and identity for understanding modern India is the theme of Appadurai's classic paper on how to make a national cuisine. He says that food -the cuisine aspect of it- is a cultural device to imagine the nation, the site of which is the cookbook¹⁹.

Cultural transmission through diverse food practices is an aspect of Diaspora. Diasporas are spatially dispersed communities²⁰. They are the medium of cultural transmission that carried, maintained and protected their cultural identity

through various practices. It is a fact that the Food-centered nostalgia is a recurring theme in studies of diasporic or expatriate populations²¹. In fact memories of these Diasporas are not gathered and ready to be accessed when needed, but are relived each time in different ways and with different emotional attachments. This is particularly evident in the case of food-related recollections. When migrants find themselves in unfamiliar sensory and cultural environments, eating is an inevitable component of daily life that forces them to interact physically, emotionally, and cognitively with the surrounding Otherness²². It is a fact that there is a large Kerala migrants in various Arabian countries who, for the sake of maintaining their cultural identity, follows local food habits. These *malayali* diaspora across the world find their cultural expression through food²³.

The taste for the local food preferences is visible when we take students to outside Kerala as a part of academic activity. One thing we ensure while planning the annual tour programme to different Indian states is the availability of Kerala food which makes our trip more pleasurable. This is true to every community. We find happiness in our regional food which is a product of our social, physical and cultural life. That is why Claude Levi Strauss and his followers sought to understand food as a cultural system which clearly recognises that taste is culturally shaped and socially controlled²⁴. Similarly culture also provides guidelines for acceptable hybridization in food and eating behaviour. Religious obligations are always at the top for people. Religious taboos always restrain a person from taking food beyond the defined ranges. For example Pork and Alcohol are prohibited for Muslims but they are acceptable for some other communities. How these prohibitions especially the fat of pork and cow had been a vital cause for the revolt of 1857 is clearly narrated in the modern Indian history²⁵. J.B.P Morey says that with mutual consent the Hindus and Muslims of Malabar kept away from eating pork and cow²⁶. At the same time Quran allows eating of prohibited items at certain critical times. This is very clear from a popular idiom among Mappilas: "Paichaal Panniyirachiyum halaal"²⁷. As far as Malayalis are concerned rice and paddy are compulsory for almost all the

religious and cultural ceremonies including the festivals and marriages. Even in the coronation ceremony of Kerala rulers, in the past, there was a practice called *Ariyittvazhcha* means giving rice and sceptre to king by the people²⁸. Not only in Kerala, but also everywhere in Asia rice has a feminine soul that must be placate and carefully nurtured²⁹.

Food culture has some association with the production system, landscape, and economic status of the people. In Kerala the *Mathi* (Sardine), is considered as the fish of poor while *Ayakoora* (Pomfret) and *Aavoli* (Silver Moony) are as rich man's fish. If you buy *aavoli* or *ayakoora* regularly that means you are rich enough to spend such an amount that will define your economic status since fish has been a feature of a Malayali's menu³⁰. Despite having nutritional advantage still *Mathi* has been treated as a fish eaten by the economically backward people. This aspect is clearly noticed by Shovic when he said a host family demonstrates its prosperity or societal rank by providing large quantities of food³¹. Similarly some food items have psychological connection with the people too. For example Bed Coffee is essential for certain people while one cannot imagine a marriage in Malabar without having Chicken Biryani. It is hard to find a Malayali celebrate Onam without drinking Paayasam.

Food is an important part of religious symbols, rites, and customs, those acts of daily life intended to bring about an orderly relationship with the spiritual or supernatural realm³². How Mappila Muslim's religious belief systems affect their food culture is highly evident in the case of Ramdan fasting. From dawn to dusk Muslim community observes fasting and they break the fast with variety of dish items. Changing pattern of Malabari Muslim food culture during the month of Ramzan, indeed, is a topic for detailed study. Along with this we should understand the banning of Beef eating by various states across India. On account of their religious belief eating Beef is prohibited among a group of Hindus but by making rules Muslims were forced to agree on that. As a secular nation, the issue of Beef eating has invited a lot of questions from different quarters of the society. This resulted in the observation of a number of Beef eating

festivals in different parts of the country. As Kancha Ilaiah said "If Beef is banned by denying the age old food habits it will be the beginning of the end of country's multiculturalism"³³.

Culture plays a key role in the food related manners among various communities. As far as Muslims are concerned eating by right hand is only acceptable for them but in the West people use forks and spoons for taking food. Similarly licking fingers after dining is polite for certain communities and impolite for others. We can also see variation in the quantity of food taken at the time of dining. In Malabar some aged people, while having the lunch, leave a little quantity of food for Cat every day. This was a routine for them. They found pleasure in doing that which also testifies their sympathy to the animals. Similarly, at the time of honey moon period, wives used to eat what their husbands have left on the plate. They were also happy in doing that. F. Faucett noticed that during the Malabar Nayer's marriage function the bride serves food to the groom, and after taking their meals together from the same leaf, they proceed to the pandal³⁴. Kittler remarks that some people from South East Asia might leave a little bit of food on their plates in order to show that their hunger has been satisfied. So cooks might be offended if food is left on the plate, since it indicates that the guest may have disliked the food.

In Kerala especially among joint families, eating together is a special feature of the family life. This helps them to discuss family matters and also it binds them more closely with one another. Another striking feature is the way food is served. The Muslim stress on brotherhood spilled into the dietary arena as communal eating was the norm. In our locality, there was the practice of dining more than 8 people from a big plate which was remarkable when we consider the changes which have taken place in the food etiquettes. This practice of group eating from a single plate was introduced to Indians by the Arabs and is widely practiced among Indian Muslims. In short food culture varies widely from region to region. However, in most part of the world, food is associated with hospitality and expression of friendship. Therefore sensitivity to food culture is important in building and strengthening human relationships.

As a common activity, social practice structures the lives of different communities and groups. Indeed they are important because they reaffirm the identity of those who practise them as a group or a society. Social practices of a particular community are closely linked to its worldview and perception of its own history. They vary from small gatherings to large-scale social celebrations and commemorations. In some cases, access to rituals may be restricted to certain members of the community; initiation rites and burial ceremonies are two such examples. Some festive events, however, are a key part of public life and are open to all members of society. Social practices shape everyday life and are familiar to all members of the community, even if not everybody participates in them. Social practices, rituals and festive events involve a dazzling variety of forms: worship rites; rites of passage; birth, wedding and funeral rituals; culinary traditions; seasonal ceremonies; practices specific to men or women only; hunting, fishing and many more. They also include a wide variety of expressions and physical elements: special

gestures and words, special clothing, processions, animal sacrifice, special food etc. The food practices of Mappila community are very important because they can provide wide variety of information which are vital to understand them as a community.

In short, as an emerging field of study Food studies examine the complex relationships among food, culture and society from numerous disciplines. It includes the study of food related areas like production, consumption, and aesthetic appreciation of food. Food studies also analyses what is the relationship of food with human experience. If one needs to study food Culture he/ she should follow an interdisciplinary approach by encompassing areas such as, Geography, Anthropology, Sociology, History etc. Food culture looks at people's relationship with food and how those food practices reveal information about them. It is the culture which defines the people's connection with their food. Every community has their own specific food stuffs which they find easy to access and love to eat.

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ART & ARCHITECTURE OF BAGALI KALLESHWARA TEMPLE - DURING KALYANA CHALUKYAS

N. Shakuntala

The Western Chalukya Empire ruled most of the western Deccan, South India, between the 10th and 12th centuries. This Kannadiga dynasty is sometimes called the Kalyana Chalukya after its regal capital at Kalyana, today's Basavakalayana in the modern Bidar District of Karnataka state, and alternatively the Later Chalukya from its theoretical relationship to the 6th century Chalukya dynasty of Badami. The dynasty is called Western Chalukyas to differentiate from the contemporaneous Eastern Chalukyas of Vengi, a separate dynasty. Knowledge of Western Chalukya history has come through examination of the numerous Kannada language inscriptions left by the kings and from the study of important contemporary literary documents in Western Chalukya literature.

The Western Chalukyas developed an architectural style known today as a transitional style, an architectural link between the style of the early Chalukya dynasty and that of the later Hoysala Empire. Most of its monuments are in the districts bordering the Tungabhadra River in central Karnataka. The Western Chalukya temples show an improvement over the previous experiments. These temples show a transition from the Nagara to Dravida style and create a new style called "Vesara" or "Karnatadravida"¹. Temples of all sizes built by the Chalukyan architects during this era remain today as examples of the architectural style.² The ornate columns are seen as one of the most important features and that is why some

of the temples such as "Mahadeva Temple" are called finest in Karnataka after Halebidu. The Temple plan in most of the plans is star shaped. Most temples are dedicated to Shiva and Nandi at the entrance of the shrine appears as a main feature.

A typical Western Chalukya temple may be examined from three aspects- the basic floor plan, the architectural articulation, and the figure sculptures. The basic floor plan is defined by the six of the shrine, the size of the sanctum, the distribution of the building mass, and by the pradakshina³, two basic kinds of architectural articulation are found in Indian architecture. The southern Indian Dravida and the Northern Indian Nagara.⁴ Figure sculptures are miniature representations that stand by themselves, including architectural components on pilasters, buildings, sculptures and on complete towers. They are generally categorised as "Figure sculpture" or other decorative features⁵ On occasion rich figure sculpture can obscure the articulation of a shrine, when representations of gods, goddesses and mythical figures are in abundance⁶.

Western Chalukya architecture also known as Kalyana Chalukya or Later Chalukya architecture, is the distinctive style of ornamented architecture that evolved during the rule of the Western Chalukya Empire in the Tungabhadra region of modern central Karnataka, India, during the 11th and 12th centuries. Western Chalukyan political