

Caste and Commensalism : Analyzing Intersections with the Contemporary, Urban ‘Foodscapes’

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Abstract

Caste as a graded system of social organization is age-old to the Indian society. One of the most pertinent features of the caste system revolves around the issue of commensalism as food is directly related to the issues of pollution and purity. Thus caste-specific diets use food as a tool for demarcating the lineage of social order by prescriptions and proscriptions related to food intake. The symbolic value associated with food permeates and influences food choices which become reflective of the social order. The methodology employed for this paper is naturalistic, unstructured observation under qualitative research method whereby the food and eating habits of the people in general in their naturalistic environment is brought under observation for the purpose of analysis. This paper seeks to analyze how in the contemporary, urban scenario as food is mediated by not only temporal and spatial disjunction with the ‘caste-men’ under the operative forces of globalization, the metaphorical landscape of food and also the associated methods related to that of production, consumption, handling, mannerisms and various other cultural associations are operative simultaneously. How the inextricable intersections between caste and food have witnessed the intrusion of a number of intervening factors that can be seen to reorient caste-based identity on the basis of food consumption to a much more ‘fluid’ state. As we look into the contemporary ‘foodscape’ we try to locate the nature and extent through which caste today can still ‘assimilate’ the traditional identity and order through food habits of its caste-men or the interface of food with other social institutions emerge significant.

Keywords: Bricolage, Commensalism, Foodscapes, Food Bias, Food Transactions, Ritual Defilement.

The word caste originated from the ideas of the Portuguese wayfarers who while trading through the west coast of India during 16th and 17th century described groups of people as ‘castas’, from which the English and French words caste was derived which means ‘species’ or ‘breeds’ of animals and tribes, races or clans among men. (Quigley, 1993). Thus referring to caste at the very onset makes us identify the problem that the concept holds is that even though it is the very basic social organizational aspect of Indian society but the essence of it goes missing with such etymological specifications. Time and again reference of caste of breeds of people highlights the problem that lies with its interpretation in non-Indian contexts.

However, the Indian society revolves around certain basic assertions which not only holds true to the Indian perspective and interpretations but also from the view of cultural outsiders. These assertions following Declan Quigley can be enumerated as: (Quigley, 1993, p.1)

The Hindu world being made into a number of castes.

- a) They are referred to as closed social groups, essentially endogamous in nature and ideally manifested to as a system of perpetuated *ad infinitum*.

b) Castes are linked with traditional professions and are hierarchically organized.

Caste or Jatis being splinter groups and actual social categories make them quite diverse and elaborate. Looking into the concept of “varna” it is quite simple and is logically designed to maintain social harmony and cosmic stability among the people (Quigley, 1993). Originating in the 1500 BCE even though ‘varna’ is regarded as a referential category but it focuses on the function of social harmony. In the book *Code of Manu* we find that each ‘varna’ by performing different functions would ensure smooth running of the entire social world of the Hindus. However Jatis remains more or less the real operational unit as the multi-layered complexity of the actual Hindu world becomes too difficult to grapple under the categorization of the ‘varna’-system.

Certain features are attributed to Jatis and all the caste men are expected to know and follow such attributes to ensure the smooth running of the caste system. These are: (Dube, 1990, p. 54)

- a) Jatis are endogamous units.
- b) They are hierarchically graded.
- c) They invariably have Jatis-linked occupation.
- d) Considerations of pollution and purity are determinants of interactions among units of Jatis.
- e) Jatis-men share a common culture and
- f) Jatis generally comply with inter-village and intra-village mechanisms of conflict resolution and control mechanisms.

The entire dilemma revolves around the question of inclusion and exclusion into the orders of the caste i.e. who would be included into one caste and who would be excluded out of it? As caste is ordained on the basis of birth and originally one is not supposed to marry outside one’s caste so the notions of social mobility stand absolutely restricted within systems of caste. Also spatial and social distancing of one caste from another is an essential condition that satisfies the orders of the ritual grading and the consequent issue of maintenance of the ideas of pollution and purity that grounds the hierarchical nature of the caste-system. Caste coming in the modern interpretations makes it problematic as the ascribed nature of caste remains linked with the hierarchically defined traditional professions. Even though that have been functional in traditional situations but in the contemporary scenario such blocking of bridges of professional mobilities make caste stand in a situation of contradiction even among caste-men.

Interface of caste with contemporary societal forces of urbanization, globalization and consequent have created a situation when even though caste remains existent in the modern society but the traditional features of the caste system have undergone sea changes especially in the urban contexts. The endeavor of caste has always been to deeply mark the boundaries between different castes through various rites and rituals so that intermingling between castes becomes problematic and so that the hierarchical order can be maintained. The Hindu social order has been depicted through the dual lines of meat-eaters and consumption of food by people of appropriate caste. This have not only helped delineate one caste from another but also played a crucial role in retaining caste integrity. The dilemma of social distancing of one caste from another that have long existed and stood in the way of intermingling of people across castes needs to be reexamined. It is assessed in this paper the changes in the caste system especially considering system of food habits and issues of commensalism and pollution and purity. We try to assess the porosity of the boundaries of the caste system in urban-industrial set-ups, which following K.L.Sharma is identified to consist of social stratification characterized by professional and working class (Sharma, 2013)

Methodology

The study is qualitative study based on the methodology of *Descriptive Research* and *broad-based*

direct observational methods have been used with the intention of observing the food rules as an object along with its occurrence and interaction with people and other societal forces. The purpose of employing descriptive research is to describe and analyze behaviours related to food and food choices, determining the conditions that direct food choices and understanding the resultant effects such choices have on a general level on caste assertions. In this paper the *naturalistic style of observation* as part of research methodology has been followed with the intention to make concrete observation of symbols relating to the process how food is interacting with people as a part of their normal, everyday setting, thus identifying the role of commensalism and food rules as factors to act as fetter to stand in the way of food selection and consumption. Thus the usefulness of employing naturalistic observation is considered to generate new ideas related to food and its consumption. The major purpose of deploying such a methodology is not only to study our subjects as part of their natural environment but also to understand the wider social and cultural setting that imbibes necessary alterations in the interactions that food is undergoing in the contemporary times. Here we have observed specific behaviours of subjects so as to gauge their relationships with food in order to not only analyze their interactions with food but also to gauge changes in interactive patterns pertaining to food and eating if any. In this paper thus an attempt to analyze the various interactions that food encounters in the contemporary world especially in the urban settings among the middle class and upper middle class Hindu people. Such analysis becomes important as not only because such interactions are new but rather is ever expanding so as to assign not only food a different space in society but also is crucial in determining how individuals react to such emergent social scenarios at the backdrop of caste.

Food undoubtedly is related to the biological response to a set of internal experiences that hunger produces but the choice of food to satiate that biological drive is necessarily deeply rooted in socio-cultural settings that act as a major determinant of appetite. The existence of caste-specific diets have a major lineage of social order. The discourses on caste have always focused on dietary prescriptions and proscriptions that Hindu caste-men are to follow.

Caste and Food Rules:

As discussed one of the most important and pertinent feature of the caste system is the issue of rules that govern who can consume what kind of food. As food directly goes to the body so caste have long played a very crucial role in underlining which food is to be consumed by whom that not only have structured unity among people of one caste but that have been instrumental in demarcating boundaries between castes. It is needless to mention here that the general proposition in this case is that the higher a Jatis is in the ritual order the more complex and elaborate are the rules regarding maintenance of hierarchy and avoidance of pollution (Dube, 1990). Dube, recognizes the dual channels through which pollution of caste may occur one through food contact and the other through physical contact. Thus spatially the way one caste is expected to maintain physical distance from another caste similarly the food habits of caste were maintained to replicate that spatial-structural distance and difference across castes. In commensuration with the caste hierarchy parallel runs a food hierarchy among the Hindus. The latter system has in its highest order the *Sattvic food*, followed by *Rajasic* and *Tamasic foods*. Even though there are regional variations but in general the *Sattvic* foods constitute of the purest form of food and is essentially vegetarian in nature and includes milk, fruits, most roots and tubors. The *Rajasic* foods include deer meat, wines from grapes and other foods, whereas *Tamasic* foods include pungent and strong smelling vegetables like onion and garlic and meats of buffalo, chicken and pig. Thus it is quite understandable that the purest form of food is the *Sattvic* food followed by the comparatively impurer categories. Thus the purest of the Jatismen like the Brahmins, who generally occupy the highest strata in the caste hierarchy expected to consume the purest forms of food i.e. the *Sattvic* foods. Likewise follows the descendance food and the social order. Consumption of taboo foods were permitted for people of even lower rungs of the

Hindu social order. Analyzing the urban scenarios we find at the backdrop of the dilemma of private versus public eating options, the entire Hindu structure have developed an anti-structure as we find in case of the public eating out options nothing corresponds to the structure of the *Sattvic*, *Rajasic* and *Tamasic* foods. Over and above such fluidities in the menus of the eateries we find there remains almost no options which helps one correlate to the caste boundaries that traditional structured Hindu social order. The people entering these places eat one's preferred food items which are indicative of the fluidity in terms of the traditional ingredients. Spatio-structural segregation of caste through restrictions of food items is almost non-existent in the urban setups.

Also the availability of the food items in the menu highlight the factor that the entire plethora of caste-based food restrictions are diluted in the public settings. Options are made available from without thus highlighting the ever-grasping capitalism to maintain and sustain itself through the hold and fold of consumption but also through depicting that through food such distinctions across castes cannot be sustained.

Caste, Sanskritization and Food Bias:

Food has been the major source surrounding which graded inequality among Hindus have structured. There has been an underlying disparity in food consumption and that exhibits an inherent bias in food choices that is often perceived to coerce the living experience of food. The basic fact lies in the socialization involved in food choices that make the apparent food bias appear as 'normal'. Thus it is quite understandable that following the caste-based ritualistic order each caste-men pertained to their traditionally permitted food boundaries. And caste being a closed system such orders were supposed to be the basis of structural definition of the caste hierarchy. However natural and internalized the system might appear but in the caste system it has often found to have been re-oriented in choice-based food systems that have in certain instances led to structural modifications of the so-called closed nature of the caste system. As M.N. Srinivas conceived in what he called *Sanskritization*, it is witnessed that certain lower castes engaged in the process of "cultural mobility" (Doshi, Jain, 2017, p.81) within the traditional social structure of the caste system to raise their position in the caste hierarchy. They generally gave up habits that were traditionally considered as "impure" by the Brahmins or upper castes. Among the practices that they gave up or adopted included or imitated constituted mostly matters of food, dress and religious rituals. Thus often it has been found that this process of blind-fold imitation of the upper castes made the lower caste give up their traditional meat-eating, liquor consumption or even offering of animal sacrifices to the dieties (Doshi, Jain: 2017). Following Damle and Lynch, and broadly following a theoretical based reference group approach, certain aspects have been identified as essential conditions of sanskritization as (Singh, 1997, p. 39) :

- i) The motivational structure or the aspiration of the members to move upward.
- ii) The opportunity structure which acts as an important factor in determining the eligibility or ineligibility of the members to move in the desired direction and
- iii) The communication structure or the 'viability' or 'observability' of the degrees of relative deprivations.

Out of these Damle and Lynch considers the first two aspects as of prime importance in the context of sanskritization. However if we consider the case of food and food choices adaptation to the model of the upper caste which comes under the motivational structure stands as of supreme importance. As highlighted in the 'Reference Group Theory', the motivational dimension and the communication dimension being comparatively active over the stringent nature of the opportunity structure makes cases of adaptation to food habits and lifestyles more frequent, even though always such efforts did not successfully lead to cases whereby the lower castes could successfully climb up the social hierarchy.

Here our soul concern is how the process of re-socialization is involved in terms of food choices that creates preferences towards certain food habits outside one's caste boundaries just based on the predominant desire to imitate the food habits of the upper caste or the twice-born castes eventually to climb up the social hierarchy. Even though Sanskritization initially meant Brahminization based on the empirical study that Srinivas made of the Coorgs in South India as mostly such efforts did not include other non-Brahmins castes who were used to be imitated even them being twice-born, like; Rajputs and Banias. Milton Singer (1964) initiated that other models of imitation should also be incorporated mostly to include the local version of Sankritic Hinduism whereby local contexts provide ample empirical evidences and the historicity and contextuality cannot be ignored to make the entire system coincide into a central model. For example: as we take into account the food habits it is not at all homogeneous in its nature. Certain food habits of the Brahmins often coincide with certain food habits of the Ksatriyas of the nearby villages. For example; Brahmins even though are the ones who are supposed to vegetarians but certain Brahmins like: Saraswat, Kashmiri and Bengali are non-vegetarians. So if adoption or alteration of the food habits are to be considered then obviously the local contexts and historical insights are seen to play a major role in dictating such re-orientations. And even when the underlying process remains the same but coming to a single consensual model has always been a structural impossibility owing to the myriad nature of the Indian caste system. Food biases are involved in not only consuming food which often defies the nutritional or the 'hygienic'-'unhygienic' dilemma but also biases are existent in every process that controls over the individual intake of food right from procurement to consumption. The edibility-inedibility dilemma has largely freed itself from the biases based on caste. It has rather re-oriented itself to include concerns regarding health, nutrition and even environment. Inedibility and edibility are no longer controlled by ideas of pollution and purity that traditionally structured to distanciate one caste from another. Biases are largely shifted to a positive backdrop which are highly controlled by dictates of consumerism. Thus disparity leading to inequality regarding food consumption have moved from caste-based orientations to class-based ones.

Caste and Pollution and Purity:

As has already been discussed that there are minute rules that define what sort of food and drink can be accepted and from whom, even though any homogeneity in this regard cannot be seen at the empirical level owing to the diversity of the caste system. Food as it enters the body so it is considered as an important source through which the purity and pollution of the people can be controlled. Thus consumption of food has always passed through the lenses of caste before it is actually consumed by the collectivity. The diversity in the restrictions on feeding and social intercourse divide India into two broad belts. In what G.S.Ghurye calls Hindustan proper, caste was traditionally found to be divided into five groups (Ghurye, 2016, p. 4) :

- a) The twice-born castes,
- b) The castes at whose hands the twice-born castes can consume *pakka* food,
- c) The castes at whose hands the twice-born castes cannot consume any kind of food but can consume water,
- d) The castes those are not untouchables but from whose hands water cannot be consumed and
- e) The untouchables whose touch pollutes not only any twice-born caste but any orthodox Hindus.

Coming to the case of the clean castes consumption of food differed on the basis of *kaccha* and *pakka* foods. *Kaccha* food is the food in which water is used as a vital ingredient. Whereas *Pakka* food is the food in which ghee or oil is required. In case of *pakka* food if water is required like in kneading or making a dough then it has to be substituted by milk. In the Hindu ritual order the highest form of *pakka* food is payasam or kheer, i.e. rice pudding if it is lightly fried in ghee and then cooked in milk.

In case of *kaccha* food one can consume food only from people from one's own caste or from people of higher castes whereas one can go down in ritual ranking when the case of *pakka* food is involved. However consumption of food of clean castes in presence or in involvement of unclean castes is considered highly polluting in the caste order. The touch of the unclean castes in case of food and water consumption is considered as necessarily polluting. The practice remained so overpowering that the unclean castes were not allowed to use wells used by upper castes as their touch was considered to pollute water (Ghurye, 2016). But these restrictions in feeding and social intercourse is unilinear in nature. As Brahmins do not accept any food from any lower castes in general across major parts of India that is considered as polluting but people of lower castes can consume food offered by Brahmins. No such polluting inhibitions exists when acceptance of food from upper caste is involved (Ghurye, 2016) i.e. all the castes can accept *kaccha* food from the Brahmins but the Brahmins do not accept *kaccha* food from anyone else apart from the Brahmins, i.e. apart from its own endogamous group. Often such dietary rules are so stringent that a Kanaujia Brahmin is said to require 'thirteen hearths' (Ghurye, 2016, p. 7) as each sub-caste within the ambit of their caste periphery considers consumption of food and water from other sub-caste as polluting.

Contrary to the popular assertion that the position of a caste is directly linked to the stringency of the maintenance of pollution and purity, it is found by citing the example of thirty-six castes out of seventy-six of Uttar Pradesh accept *kaccha* food from their caste-men only. This depicts the practice that one's social position has little to do with one's feeling of adherence to commensal restrictions that imply the homogeneity and we-feeling that is often observed among caste-men. However regional disparities in commensal restrictions are witnessed alongside stringent reservations of pollution by touch are more a feature of Southern parts of India over the Northern parts (Ghurye, 2016). Ghurye points out in what he compartmentalized as Hindustan did not feature the idea of the transmission of impurity by the mere shadow of a lower-caste-men. However leave alone the acceptance of food or maintain commensal restriction in a more or less rigid and homogeneous way. So not only upper caste Hindus consider the touch of a *Chamar* or *Dom* polluting but what Ghurye observes that branches of *Dom*, *The Bansphor* of *Basor* refrains from coming in physical contact with a *Dom* or a *Dhobi*. or the *Mausahar*, *Chamar*, *Dharkar* and *Bhangi* (Ghurye, 2016, p. 8). However in Gujarat, Eastern, Southern Bengal and almost entire South India seldom distinctions of *kaccha* food is found as there arises no question of accepting any kind of food from any people apart from one's caste-men and this feature permeates across all the sections of the society. Again in Gujarat and Southern India there are no restrictions in accepting water from people of other castes.

Ghurye further elaborates the caste spectrum in Bengal. He identified the two polar castes of Bengal as: the Brahmins and the Shudras. He divided Shudras into the following four sub-castes: (Ghurye, 2016, p. 8) :

- i) The *Sat Shudras* in which he included castes as the *Kayastha* and *Nabashakh*,
- ii) *Jalacharaniya-Shudras* who include people who are technically separated from the *Nabashakh* caste and from whom there are no commensal restrictions of the Brahmins.
- iii) The *Jalabyabaharya-Shudras* they categorize as groups from whom a Brahmin cannot take water and
- iv) *Asprishya-Shudra* whose touch is not only considered as polluting to the other castes but also they have the power to pollute Ganges water.

Similarities in food and commensal restrictions of Bengal resembles the case of Hindustan with a few stringent rules regarding *kaccha* food were found in Bengal. However instances of accepting *pakka* food outside the periphery of one's caste and from the upper caste has been witnessed in Bengal as people consumed food from the confectioner class of *Halwais* and *Myras* (Ghurye, 2016, p. 8). This can be analyzed to be based on a relative equilibrium on the binary of pure and impure based on the

principle of efficiency which the confectioner class is supposed to manifest with the relatively fewer restrictions on *pakka* food which the confectionary items constituted.

The contemporary Indian society has moved much forward and over the binary positions of impure and pure. The 'cumulative' inequality' as professed by the caste system has seen major reorientations over the class defined 'dispersed inequality' (Singh, 1997, p. 47) Factors like urbanization, Westernization, modern education and a universal homogeneous orientations towards the class-based structural reorientations have caused a major shift in systems of pollution and purity. Purity of the body has been majorly replaced by purity of the soul. Food as a bearer or as a symbol of maintaining purity of the body is questioned. Rather purity of the soul is emphasized. A major rise in the practices of meditation as a source of healing of the mind is observed. Thus decline in tendencies of relegating food as a source of maintenance of purity of the body or as a potential source of pollution is replaced by treating food as a means of satiating the desires or gratifying the cycles of consumption is observed.

Caste, Food Transactions and Commensalism:

Commensalism is the act of eating together in the same table or eating with other people. Thus commensalism has got an importance in the aspect of "human sociality" (Fishler, 2011, p. 2). Caste is structured through the age-old, socio-cultural dimension of commensalism. It is reciprocal in nature as with it is intertwined the dimension of collectivity as against individuality. Eating regulation is also a vital function that commensality serves. Food transactions have since time immemorial played a havoc role to delineate and thereby distanciate one caste from another. Food consumption remains guided by the questions regarding food is cooked by whom? Various rules regarding inter-dining, eating together etc. i.e. rules regarding commensalism is one of the founding pillars of the Hindu caste system. Leaving aside cases of Apastamba¹, for food generally food cooked by a shudra makes a Brahmin impure. The concept that the touch or physical vicinity or even appearance of certain persons have the power of defiling or sanctification of another person. Thus commensal restrictions are grounded in the *Sutras* which set down strict rules that define how stringently communal meals must be structured. Instances of such restrictions are ample in the law-texts that identify the reasons of defilement of an upper caste person. Thus the Chandalas by their mere touch can pollute the people of the twice-born castes. Moreover if a Brahmin, Gautama says consumes food prepared by a Chandala unintentionally then he becomes out-casted. However if it is done intentionally he becomes equivalent to a Chandala.

Not only across Jatis but also within Jatis various gradations have restricted inter-dining. This notion of commensalism revolves around the fact that following which food rules would help a caste-man maintain his purity and following which rules of dining would essentially pollute him. When one consumes *pakka* food the chances or conditions of pollution are much lesser whereas the chances increase when *kaccha* food is concerned.

In post-independent India, as Dipankar Gupta pointed out that sanskritization and secularization by going hand in hand have acted to somewhat dilute the function of castes through commensal restrictions thereby to maintain social exclusivity. The ritual dimensions were opened up with the importance and enlargement of ceremonial dimensions. Specially in urban settings, when food is served on festive occasions maintaining of the food rules of the caste stands as a material impossibility. Similar things are reiterated in the rural settings as observed by Adrian C. Mayer. By repeated visits between 1954 and 1992 in the villages of central India aspects of continuity and changes have been observed. Constant interaction with the people outside villages and travels outside the rural boundaries along with eateries emerging alongside rural roads have led to the relaxation of the commensal restrictions however not defying the existence of caste-based commensal restrictions.

As in urban settings women are going out and working a substitute is required who would cook or help in the various subsidiary works that cooking involves. This have seen the proliferation of cooks and

¹ In case of Apastamba food is cooked by a Shudra under the guidance of higher caste.

domestic helps in private settings. Caste and rules of commensalism have almost disappeared among Hindu household especially in urban settings as the efficiency dimension stands out to determine the involvement of household helps.

Similar things are replicated in the public settings of food consumption. People choose restaurants determined by their taste, ambience, service and cost over the factors determined by who washes the cutleries and sets up the table, who cooks food, who delivers it or even who the owner of the restaurant is and so on and so forth. Even concerning the notions of inter-dining caste-based restrictions have almost evaporated as it is observed that not only inter-dining have attained a secular re-orientation but also the tendencies of eating and gathering over food is mostly involved with secondary kinsmen. All of these aspects of commensal restrictions have majorly diluted in the contemporary social set-up. Commensalism is observed to be bound by time and place. It had attained a dynamic nature. The traditional orientations of caste in determining rules of dining, eating together have been replaced by class-based dimensions of food consumption. Caste-based commensalism in eating practices is seen to be replaced by class-based commensalism. They are manifestative of the individualization perspective as commensal conditions have become choice-based making one choose with whom one wants to share the table and have the meal. Also the traditional mannerisms that were caste-bound which were reflected in manners of consuming food have been essentially altered. The use of cutleries, table manners and mannerisms have all attained a global character much in contrast with the traditional mannerisms as outlined by caste.

Caste, Food and Ritual Defilement:

Caste conforming to the ritual order corresponds to dietary rules and regulations and any violation in the same calls for defilement of the ritual order. Thus sticking to dietary restrictions are very vital to the Hindu ritual order. Not only consumption of permitted but the entire process of procuring food, cooking, serving and all other processes involved in food consumption are ritually sanctioned and thereby any alterations in that calls for defilement of the ritual order. The process of ritual purification is involved in consumption. In case of water drawn from wells in rural Bengal traditionally it is observed that it also is a major potential ground of defilement on being used by lower caste men. Generally they were compelled to live in the outskirts of the village and use wells defined for them. However in absence of such separate facilities strict rules defined on how to use them so that it does not get polluted by the touch of the 'untouchables'. As illustrated by G.S.Ghurye, there are categorizations of wells in orders of defilement. A masonry well cannot be easily polluted with an 'impure' touch whereas a well build by clap-pipes is easily polluted. However the fear of contamination in case of latter can be significantly diminished if it exceeds three and a half cubits in width so that a cow (ritually pure in the Hindu religious order) may turn round it. Such intricacies of the caste rules regarding food and commensalism makes it very difficult to analytically develop a single system of caste rules that is effective in binding the entire Indian society makes it a structural impossibility.

Ritual uncleanliness is perceived as a kind of deviance within the fold of religion. Often religious feasting and fasting in orders as prescribed by religions have accompanying rituals which may be simple or even elaborate in nature are expected to be followed by the collectivity. In urban settings even though certain ceremonial food rules are followed we find there has been subsequent decline in day to day rituals concerning food. But the orientations are broadly based on the dimensions of convenience over structural distancing of castes within the framework of religion. Even sharing of food among people across castes and religions even point out to the fact how a secularist dimension plays a pivotal role among urban communities.

Conclusion: From Caste based Restrictions towards Foodways

The "foodways" is defined as the major markers of food related behaviours that are believed to identify the primary cultural attributes of any individual or groups (Katz, 2003). Foodways is perceived as a

constituent of every small or large culture and is constructed at the level of analysis and comparison that makes concepts regarding and surrounding food easily understandable. Foodways infuses with it other aspects like 'leisureways', 'lifeways' etc. to give yet a generality on one hand as well as a particularity on the other. Foodways being an umbrella term to incorporate the cultural, social and economic practices relating to food production and consumption is crucial in analysis in this paper as it examines the intersections that food has with culture, tradition and history at any point of time. The food related behaviours as are specific to cultures are bound to be representative and expressive of cultural diversity and cultural exchange. What is perceived as fascinating is how there has been a general expansion of the term 'foodways' as we see it attain a definitive place in our daily lives. Moreover foodways are encountering repetitive intersections with increasing number of social forces and these rapid encounters have made food an essential way of life and a medium of lifestyle designation and construction, however transient it may be. The aspect of foodways being expressive of cultural diversity has attained a newer twist. Food even though has become an important component of culture by being an increasing medium of defining way of life but the culture no longer refrains itself to the local ones but has made way for the global culture. The interaction of food in terms of foodways with history and culture has largely liberated itself from the shackles of local cultures, caste identities and history. The availability of food items have acquired a global stature when everything is available across the globe almost all throughout the year making us rethink about the contours the 'global' and the 'local' and the consequent interaction with cultural history (if at all). It makes way for indulgences just for the sake of pleasure of consumption that is engaged in for its own sake.

Essentialism to food choices based on position in caste hierarchy has been lost. Convenience have taken over essentialist prerogative over the traditional demarcators that have long structured the caste hierarchies among the Hindus. *Availability, accessibility* and *affordability* have emerged as the three most important players that determine food choices among urban Hindus. Fluidity in terms of food consumption across people is witnessed that essentially creates an anti-structure to the traditional hierarchical specifications that restricted free-mixing across castes. Experiencing of the caste privilege have been taken over by the experiences associated with food consumption. Food snobbery based on caste-prescribed diets is seen to be majorly replaced by treating food as a medium of maintenance of social snobbery. The latter being highly demarcated by notions of class over caste.

Thus finally to conclude what we can say is that in the contemporary times what is observed in case of food choices among urban, youth is that they exhibit what can be called "restrictive casteism" which has attained a spatio-temporal dimension. Adherence to caste based rules have become restrictive in terms of selecting what to do and what not, largely they pick and choose options that create a bricolage concerning food consumption that is based on factors of availability and convenience. It has attained a spatio-temporal dimension, as people mostly choose in certain spaces and during certain times caste-based rituals through which perhaps the existence of caste as a system of social organization is lived and re-inforced among the collectivity. An essential dilution is observed in maintaining purity of the body or polluting it on the basis of food consumption. In urban social settings the original function of maintaining distance between castes by highlighting rules and regulations are seen to be diluted. The cosmopolitan set-up, the residence patterns, the intermingling in social setups have diluted boundaries between castes, so structurally and socio-culturally maintaining distance between castes stand as an impossibility under the umbrella of globalization and the other consequent social forces. Thus caste in urban set-up is seen to manifest structural incongruities as the organic nature of caste is seen to be essentially lost. They themselves from within create a process of selective equilibrium between what would constitute their caste identity. They themselves decide on what would constitute their ideas of holiness. Fluidity is observed in terms of maintenance of caste identity pertaining to food consumption. Thus what we witness is an intermingling of the 'Great' and 'Little' traditions (Robert Redfield) when it comes food choices and habits. The invasion of the global food and eating habits is seen to modify the local food choices leading to the dual process of 'Parochialisation' on one

hand and 'Universalization' on the other.

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