

THE CHANGING POPULAR CULTURE OF INDIAN FOOD: PRELIMINARY NOTES¹

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ABSTRACT Culinary changes and modes of public dining are undergoing rapid changes in India and have begun to reflect some of the new strands in the culture of Indian politics. A national cuisine may not have emerged but some pan-Indian trends are visible. Even a rudimentary fast food culture is crystallising out of familiar regional preparations. Simultaneously, new concepts of what kind of food can be served on formal occasions and of cuisines that can or cannot provide effective restaurant fare are changing the relationships between different regional cuisines.

KEYWORDS: *cosmopolitanism, cultural survival, culture, ethnic cuisines, food, global market*

Indian Cuisines and their New Global Context

It is a part of the tacit wisdom of many scholars of China and India that, traditionally, most discourses on food have centred on health and nutrition in China and on social and religious rituals in India. The new forces of global commercial integration, which have reportedly expanded the estimated global market of ethnic dining to more than 800 billion dollars, have, paradoxically, picked up exactly these two themes – food as health and food as a social ritual – to reorder and formalize the cuisines of all countries according to its own needs. The ideas of health and ritual under globalization are, of course, not the older ideas of health and ritual in these countries. They have more to do with the growing awareness of the excesses of consumerism and waste, the emergence of food, particularly some kinds of ethnic food, as a marker of social success and cultivation, and the decline of the ‘natural’ capacity that ordinary citizens once had to instinctively discriminate between the healthy and the unhealthy, or to check unqualified hedonism or intemperance in food.

Food is now supposed to remedy some of the health problems that food itself has produced and to serve as a quick fix for problems such as obesity, malnutrition,

cardiovascular and oncological disorders, even sedentary lifestyle and repetitious work. Prosperity, to the utter consternation of many, has not produced easy access to and a larger choice of healthier and better food but a surfeit of non-nutritive, expensive, often seductive, cleverly marketed food that has created a scarcity of food that one can eat and enjoy without preplanning or thinking. As a result, a new stratum of experts has emerged, advising people on eating in general, and on eating out in particular. The obverse of this is a widespread decline in many countries of the self-confidence of common citizens, who increasingly feel that they, by themselves, cannot choose their food or eat it, either at home or outside, without professional help.

These developments have induced subtle changes in the cultural status and meanings of Indian cuisines, taking place mostly outside the range of vision of nutritionists, ethnographers and columnists writing on food or restaurants. Few seem aware that the traditional concerns of ethnography of food – the cooked and the raw, the pure and the polluted, commensality and its absence, the sanctified and the profane – have merged now with a new, more fluid politics of food in countries like India. These politics are radically altering, perhaps for the first time, the relationship and the pecking order among cuisines that may have acknowledged each other's presence for centuries, but never as self-conscious, autonomous, well-bounded culinary traditions. That new self-awareness is introducing new subcultures of food, status games among culinary traditions, and a new political economy of public and private dining. India now seems determined to prove Philip McMichael (2004) right when he says, 'Diets have a political history framed by class, cultural and imperial relations. Animal protein consumption signals rising affluence and emulation of Western diets. Movement up the food chain hierarchy (from starch, to grain, to animal protein and vegetables) is identified with modernity'. Above all, the new self-awareness is allowing a new kind of politics of 'authenticity', not within the cultures being exposed to globalization, but within the dominant culture of global cosmopolitanism, driven by the ideas of an alien that is familiar and the exotic that is accessible.

In this sense, the crucial issues that have come to dog Indian cuisine are not radically different from the questions that dog Indian cultural life in general. The contours of this life are increasingly defined not merely within the geographical boundaries of India but by, what most Indians consider, the less familiar territory of Indianness as a form of ethnicity that is being re-imported from the diaspora into India to reshape many domains of life, including the cultures of food within the country. A number of intersecting issues seem to dominate this redefinition; we shall concentrate on only four of them: the changing idea of authenticity as it freezes the boundaries of ethnic food, the emergence of fast food as a new genre within which some cuisines have an edge over others, the gradual crystallization of new high and low cultures of cuisines that are 'globalizable' or can be given a larger territorial and cultural reach, and the growing tendency to re-vision ethnic food not so much as the marker of a culture as a synecdoche or substitute for culture.

Changing Ideas of Authenticity

Food can be authentic in more ways than one.² It can be inauthentic, too, in more than one way. However, in the high culture of international food, the term

'inauthentic' has usually two meanings – compromises made with the taste of those who do not belong to the ethnic cuisine for commercial or other reasons extraneous to local taste, and compromises made with recipes to cope with the unavailability or paucity of ingredients. Such a concept of authenticity presumes the existence of boundaries that are difficult to associate with Indian food.

First, as far as food is concerned, India can claim to be, by far, the most diverse society in the world. Not merely that: Indians have borrowed heavily, unashamedly and openly from virtually every corner of the globe. The story of Indian food is often the story of the blatantly exogenous becoming prototypically authentic. Many food items that seem Indian came to India late in the day. Of course, there are always a few ultra-nationalists who claim that these preparations and ingredients are Indian and the foreigners, either dishonestly or out of ignorance, consider them to be originally theirs. Almost invariably such nationalists rely on some old texts where some of the analogues of cauliflowers and mushrooms are mentioned.

Attractive though such theories are, at least Indian vegetarian cuisine would have been devastatingly poorer if potato, tomato, French bean, sweet potato, tapioca, cashew nut, capsicum, maize, rajmah, papaya and, more recently, cheese and cocoa were not made a part of the cook's repertoire. Even more painful for the Indian food nationalist could be the fact that chilli, an inescapable part of Indian cuisine today, came to India from South America. So did pineapple, guava and chiku. Peach, pear, cinnamon, blackberry, lychee, cherry, and the ubiquitous tea came from China; cauliflower from Europe; onion from Central Asia. India is known for its spices, but some of its most important spices, including a few that are central not only to cuisine but to indigenous healing traditions, have come from outside. Among them are garlic, turmeric, fenugreek, ginger, cinnamon, and asafoetida. Both India's diversity and uniqueness in the matter of food owe their vivacity to a certain cultural openness to the strange and the unknown.

Not merely ingredients came to the subcontinent, but also recipes. Recently food historian K.T. Achaya has demoralized Indian nationalists further by suggesting that the venerable *idli*, the pride of South Indians of all hues, acquired its present form from Indonesian kings who visited India to look for brides (Achaya, 1998a: 104–5). It is a homeomorphic equivalent, as Raimundo Panikkar might say, of the Chinese rice ball. Likewise, *jalebi*, Achaya archly suggests, might have come from Persia. These are only the tips of an iceberg. All around India one finds preparations that came originally from outside South Asia. Kebabs came from West and Central Asia and underwent radical metamorphosis in the hot and dusty plains of India. So did *biryani* and *pulao*, two rice preparations, usually with meat. Without them, ceremonial dining in many parts of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh is incomplete. Even the term *pulao* or *pilav* seems to have come from Arabic and Persian. It is true that in Sanskrit – in the *Yājñavalkya Smṛiti* – and in old Tamil the term *pulao* occurs (Achaya, 1998b: 11), but it is also true that *biryani* and *pulao* today carry mainly the stamp of the Mughal times and its Persianized high culture.

Yet, all said, Indian *pulao* is not the same as Persian *pilaf* and, though in recent years it has been influenced by Chinese fried rice, it is not fried rice either.

Exactly as the *idli* is not the Chinese rice ball. Many of these imported foodstuffs have been creatively modified and the range of their use altered. The use of chillies – in pickles, chutneys, and curries, of the kind that often brings out steam from one's ears – cannot be easily explained away as only Latin America's contribution to Indian or, for that matter, Sri Lankan or Thai life. Likewise, the rediscovery of potato, mainly a substitute for cereals in European and North American menus, as a 'green' vegetable has changed the face of Indian cuisine. A quick look at some of the well-known cookbooks suggests that there are at least 300 main preparations of potato in the region, many of them claiming to be traditional local recipes. The figure could easily be much higher. Potato in India has risen much above its humble, European incarnation.

As a general principle, in the world of food, too, the Indian genius has been in the management of chaos, celebration of diversity and orthogenetic transformation of the exogenous. There are dozens if not hundreds of varieties of *pulao*, *dosai* and *kebab*. As in other areas of life, everybody has one's favourite version of a particular preparation and considers other local preparations as inferior or to be avoided. However, these rankings of cuisine are no longer reciprocal, in the sense that these evaluations are no longer seen as natural ethnocentrism of taste, balancing or checkmating each other. Slowly, new classifications are emerging where new market conditions and greater exposure to international food are shaping new, more rigid status relationships among the various cuisines.

The Emergence of Fast Food

One example of such changes is the rediscovery of some cuisines as more compatible with the contemporary idea of fast food. As urbanization and industrialization speed up in India and the country's political economy moves towards an arrangement more compatible with globalized capitalism, the fast-food market, too, has expanded dramatically. A sizeable section of urban India now senses the need for something like fast food. However, the formulaic concept of fast food has not made deep inroads in urban awareness. A very large proportion of the clientele of fast food still do not identify such food as a genre, with its specific limitations and problems. In India, one rarely finds nutritionists or columnists on food lamenting the growing popularity of fast food. McDonald's is still viewed, as its advertisements claim, as a moderately fashionable family restaurant and Pizza Hut is seen as a haunt of the upper-middle class youth who have money to spare.

Yet, the Indian fast food industry is not new. What could be called its primitive version developed in the latter half of the 19th century in the presidency towns – as Calcutta, Madras and Bombay were called – during the colonial period. It was mainly a response to the needs of some of those who had entered the colonial political economy and commuted long distances from home to work in a metropolis – the 'daily passengers', as they were called in Calcutta. One part of the menu on which the restaurants thrived were, at least in name, English or French: cutlets, patties, chops, omelettes, and so on. These, of course, had little to do with their namesakes in the West, in looks, smell and taste. Though considered

street-food by most Europeans and urbane Indians, their complicated, labour-intensive spicing and cooking made them a distinctive genre for Asian palates and perhaps also for some among the present generation of Europeans, more accustomed to heavier use of spices. The other part of this rudimentary tradition of fast food included mostly North Indian snacks, such as turnovers (*samosas*) of various kinds and handmade breads such as *parathas* and *puris*. Together they constituted the new concept of 'tiffin', an earlier version of what today might be called snacks.

In recent decades, the colonial fast food preparations have been partly overtaken in popularity by South Indian food creations like *idli*, *dosai*, *vada* and *uthappam*. Indeed, if you talk of Indian fast food, these are the food items that come first to one's mind. The second most preferred set now consists of some of the North Indian, particularly Punjabi favourites, such as *chhole-bhatore* or *chhole-kulche*, *tikki* and *dahi bhalla*. More recently, a couple of Gujarati preparations have joined the list. It is possible that in future, Gujarat, with its rich array of *farsans*, will offer stiffer competition to the South Indian preparations, but that is in the future. In the meantime, South Indians have a clear edge as far as the popular Indian image of Indian fast food goes. The partitioning of British India has helped the process. South India is now a larger part of India than it previously was and its greater influence in other parts of India is, to some extent, natural. This is somewhat analogous to the process through which Sanskritized Hindi, despite the best efforts of India's official TV and bureaucracy, has gained in popularity. Many once thought that such Hindi would survive only as an officialese or as a comic relief in popular films. But the fact remains that, irrespective of caste and religion, most South Indians can understand stilted, cramped, Sanskritized Hindi better than Urdu.

However, there is another kind of status game involved in the growing association between the contemporary ideas of fast food and certain styles of cooking. There is a tacit assumption in global cosmopolitanism that any form of fast food is, by definition, lowbrow and cannot easily be part of a high cuisine. No connoisseur of Italian food expects to see pizza in the menu of a respectable Italian restaurant, exactly as no one expects to be served hamburgers when invited to dinner in an American home. This ambivalent status of fast food is likely to create problems in India, where some preparations, re-designated as parts of the fast food culture, continue to be part of high cuisine too. You might still be served *dosa* when invited to a Tamil household, though it may not be the now-ubiquitous *masala dosa*, and *puris* continue to be served in marriage feasts all over India.

The Emerging Stratarchy of Cuisines

The second major development is the way in which, during the last five decades, formal or ceremonial food in metropolitan India has increasingly come to be dominated by two cuisines, the Mughal and the Punjabi.³ Indeed, outside rural Punjab and a few alert capitals of Mughal cuisine like Lucknow and Hyderabad, the two are no longer clearly separable. Even in regions that have their own

diverse traditions of cooking, such as Uttar Pradesh, Andhra, West Bengal, Orissa, Karnataka and Maharashtra, Punjabi and Mughal cuisines are getting associated with a formal meal and dining out.⁴ The process has been strengthened by the Indian diaspora and First World patrons whose imagination of Indian food is limited and has, necessarily, a generic touch.

Of the two dominant systems, the importance of Mughal cuisine is understandable; it was associated with the Mughal court and has evolved over a period of roughly 400 years. More surprising is the manner in which Punjabi cuisine has gate-crashed into the big league, not only in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, but wherever Indian food is served. The *tandoor* is now a major symbol of Indian cuisine. Even in Sri Lanka, a few nautical miles away from South India, Indian food, when not Tamil, is mainly Punjabi-Mughal.

Many of the 1500 odd Indian restaurants in the United Kingdom, roughly 1100 of them reportedly located in London, are run by Bangladeshis, frequently migrants from Sylhet, but most of them seem committed to a mixture of Mughal and Punjabi food.⁵ This centrality of Punjabi cuisine (actually it is mainly the centrality of that part of Punjabi cuisine that can blend with the popular idea of Mughal food) is particularly surprising because territorially Punjab may be three-fourth of Pakistan, but it is only one-thirtieth of India and it has little to do with Bangladesh. Even in England, while the Punjabis are a sizeable presence in the South Asian diaspora, they are certainly not more numerous than the Gujaratis, who also have the additional advantage of being prosperous. Also, not all Bangladeshis are adept in Punjabi cooking. Many of them serve excellent Punjabi preparations but many are, at best, mediocre. After all, this is not the food the Bangladeshis eat at home or the food they have grown up with. Among Bengalis, ceremonial food has for long had a Mughal touch, but the Punjabi connection is new. One often wonders why more of the Bengali restaurants in Britain do not serve the food they know well and eat at home. But most Bangladeshi restaurateurs, I suspect, would consider it blasphemy if someone suggests to them that they serve Bengali cuisine. How can one run an Indian restaurant, which is not a vegetarian or an exclusively South Indian or Gujarati joint, unless one serves Mughal and Punjabi food?

Partly this attitude has something to do with the Bengali concepts of ceremonial and everyday food and of food that can be legitimately served on formal, public occasions and in restaurants. All societies have well-honed ideas of how food is related to occasion, time and space. Bengalis, for instance, have always sung the glories of Bengali food but, when it comes to eating or serving food outside the home, they tend to choose some version of Mughal, North Indian or, less frequently, European food, by which they usually mean Indianized British food, given fancy French or Italian names. Bengali food for most Bengalis is decisively not a restaurant food. The restaurants or cafeterias that serve Bengali food are usually seen as lowbrow 'eating places'.

Calcutta's first recognizably Bengali restaurant was founded in the 1960s. It was a particularly modest affair, run by a women's cooperative, set up to create job opportunities for unemployed women. The city's first up-market Bengali restaurant opened in the 1990s. Kasturi in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, is arguably

the best Bengali restaurant in the world, but it is also relatively new. Though its owners claim a longer history, my suspicion is that it began to function in its present incarnation in the 1980s. There still persists the belief that you do not eat Bengali food in a restaurant; you eat it at home. On formal occasions like marriage and anniversaries, as long you do not organize them as events in restaurants, you may serve Bengali food, but usually with a touch of the Mughal. Bengali food is only now becoming restaurant food.

Though Punjabi food is a dominant presence in Indian restaurants the world over, strangely, a somewhat similar division exists between ceremonial or festive food and everyday food in Punjab. Such division is much less pronounced in some other parts of India. For instance, in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamilnadu and Rajasthan, festive food differs from everyday food in mostly the number of items cooked, not in the kind of items cooked.⁶

These two processes, the emergence of fast food and the appearance of a pan-Indian concept of 'formal' Indian food, are contextualized by more serious changes in the sociology of the Indian family. The older models of socialization are becoming recessive in urban, middle-class India and preparation of food is becoming less of a matter of apprenticeship at home for daughters, daughters-in-law, and younger women in the family and more a matter of cultivated taste and de-gendered expertise for many. Cooking classes, particularly courses in ethnic cuisine, are becoming increasingly popular in urban India and a galaxy of famous, mediagenic chefs have become household names, thanks to their popular television shows and frequent newspaper interviews. Their coffee-table cookbooks are also becoming important acquisitions.

This process is less conspicuous but probably more pervasive in more modest middle-class households. Pradip Bose (1997) wrote an excellent article on the first truly popular Bengali cookbook and its cultural status, showing how deeply the standard Bengali recipe book and guide to proper cooking and dining, Bipradas Bandopadhyay's *Pakpranali* has penetrated middle-class culture and shaped the concept of good and healthy cooking for at least three generations of Bengalis. The book has become a part of the cultural history of contemporary Bengal, not so much a standard textbook as an authoritative reference point. Few cook according to *Pakpranali*, not even probably the young brides who are ritually gifted the book at the time of marriage. But everyone compares his or her own recipes with those described in the book. The Bengalis, particularly the Bengali Bhadrakalok, may not have developed something resembling a national cuisine, *à la* Appadurai, but they have found an authoritative text that cuts across local differences, tastes, and preferences. The situation is more fragmented in the case of other regional cuisines.

Finally, the pecking order of the different cuisines is changing, in response to new global and local demands, including the emergence of a pan-Indian market. At the bottom of the market, the cuisines that are expected to be served, according to the clientele – and 'deserve' to be served, according to the restaurateurs – can be easily identified from the low-brow multiple-cuisine, street-corner restaurants that dot the metropolitan cities. Most of them proclaim that they serve Mughal, Chinese and South Indian food. Of these, Indian-Chinese

food deserves a comment. Once despised among the elite as Punjabi Chinese, Calcutta Chinese or Indian Chinese, this food is one of the fastest growing cuisines in India. So much so that waiters and cooks from Northeast India and from among expatriate Tibetans are in high demand in these restaurants. They can pass off as Chinese and give patrons the feeling that they are getting the authentic stuff. Some wonder if the subterfuge is needed in the first place, given that the patrons are often non-demanding, first-generation urbanites, perfectly happy as long as they get their fried noodles.

The popularity and easy coexistence of the street-corner versions of these cuisines hides an important issue germane to the upper reaches of restaurant culture: the legitimacy of ethnic food that blatantly bears an imprint of the local. There seem to be two kinds of adaptation involved here, one produced by enterprising restaurateurs from the receiving community, the other by the expatriate ethnics involved in food business themselves. Singapore Chinese cooking is esteemed, so is Penang's famed Chinese food. These styles have emerged from old Chinese settlements outside China and they have acquired distinctive nuances, thanks to exposure to local cuisines, food habits, availability of some ingredients and unavailability of others. By the same token, Calcutta's China town, Tangra, has produced a distinctive style of Chinese cooking. It carries a detectable touch of its Bengali ambience. Thousands of miles away from mainland China, the Chinese in Calcutta had to improvise in the matter of ingredients and, when they opened restaurants, they had to adapt to local taste. The adaptation came in the form of an Indianized Cantonese style, considered more suited to the palates of Europeans, North Americans and Anglicized South Asians. It is a clue to the global hierarchy of cultures that the spicier Hunanese, Szechwanese and Thai cuisines became popular in spice-guzzling South Asia only after they became popular in the West. The first kind of elaboration, due to the unavailability of some ingredients and the incorporation of local, easily available, vegetables, meats, fishes and spices, obviously should have not only legitimacy, but also a certain fascination. It should give the Indian Chinese cuisine a special appeal.

However, that has not happened till now, thanks, once again, to the ideas of authenticity and hierarchy pervading comparative estimates of cuisines. Indian Chinese food has not found acceptance even as an attempted fusion food, the way admiring Japanese through the few celebrated Tokyo restaurants that serve French Chinese food. It is my belief that Indian Chinese cooking, like the action films of Hong Kong and Bombay's commercial cinema, is waiting to be given a new respectability by an enterprising Indian-Chinese restaurateur. We shall have to wait for an Ang Lee of food who will shake us out of our complacency. The first sign is that of the one and a half New Delhi restaurants specializing in Bengali cuisine, one has diffidently begun to offer Calcutta-style Chinese food as a diversion from its Bengali menu. Likewise, of the two Bengali restaurants at Mumbai, both new, one now serves Indian-Chinese fare. This would have looked strange only a decade ago, even though a large number of Chinese restaurants in Delhi employ Chinese cooks from Calcutta and many Delhi citizens are exposed and perhaps have even got used to Calcutta's Chinese food without knowing that they are so exposed.

Re-visioning Ethnic Food as a Substitute for Culture

The popular culture of food is influenced not merely by the political interplay of cuisines and mutating tastes but also by less institutionalized roles for food that collective experiences in contemporary times have created. These experiences ensure that food in some cases gets associated not only with traditional concepts of health, illness, and nutrition or serves as a cultural marker of status, taste, and cultivation, but also carries the reflections of personal and collective milestones and traumata. It begins to mirror new constituents of self-definition. When a child has the first taste of rice, it is an important and auspicious moment in many eastern Indian households and indicates membership of a social net. Similarly, in some parts of India a patient is seen to be decisively on the road to recovery when the family doctor allows him or her to go back to normal food. However, these are no longer the only milestones and crises to which food now bears witness. Carrying the imprint of our times, food in a small way can page-mark one's experiences of a genocide or exodus, too. Some families uprooted during the Partition violence in 1946–8, when running away from their ancestral land, had left behind food in the refrigerator. They were hoping to go back after, what they thought, would turn out to be a temporary madness induced by sectional politics. Food has become the stuff of memory for these uprooted victims, sometimes more important than the death of family members and friends. As we found out during a recent study, in a few cases, they repeatedly, almost obsessively, speak of frozen chickens and jars of pickles and jams left behind, as if that was their way of coping with bigger, more painful losses. The lost village, too, is remembered through food. It is a village uncontaminated by religious hatred and, as such, also has to be remembered as a place where water was sweeter, vegetables greener, and milk purer.⁷

In a few instances during the exodus, some survivors, running to safety dehydrated in the rough summer of Northern Indian plains, had to drink their own urine and to force their young children to drink theirs. When interviewed after 55 years, the experience rankled, more vividly than the killings and the loss of close relatives. One such victim, a young boy called A.Q. Khan, who went through a similar experience when running away to the newly formed country of Pakistan through the Rajasthan desert in the mid-1940s, mentioned his experience as the ultimate reason for building a nuclear weapon for his country in the mid-1990s.

If food can be a reflection of our profligacy and suicidal tendencies, food can also be a record of our violence and ethnocidal propensities. Not merely because eating together, commensality, can define the boundaries of an in-group, but also because of the way in which eating or drinking can be turned into a traumatic instance of humiliation. I have not discussed these issues here in any detail because the emphasis in this article is on the popular culture of food. However, even in the context of the issues raised here, one possibility remains open. In a globalizing world, while the culture of ethnic cuisine and ethnic dining can become more and more a symbol of multicultural sensitivities and cosmopolitanism, it also increasingly becomes a major symbolic substitute for the culture it

supposedly represents. As I have argued elsewhere, in this cosmopolitanism, the distinctive cultural styles of food are paradoxically becoming more autonomous from the cultures from which the cuisines come and the civilizations or lifestyles they represent (Nandy, 2004). And this is the way things should go, most people seem to believe. Ethnic cuisine is expected to be autonomous of the demands and requirements of culture from which it emanates, and becomes a manageable representation of an alien culture for the cognoscenti belonging to other cultures. As the contemporary world pushes more and more cultures into extinction, talking incessantly of multiculturalism and democratic tolerance, ethnic cuisine becomes more and more like a museum or a stage on which a culture writes its name or signs an attendance register, declaring its survival for the sake of appeasing our moral conscience.

Notes

- 1 An earlier, cruder version of this article was delivered as a Keynote Speech at a conference on food convened by Rachel Dwyer at SOAS, University of London, 22 November, 2002. The responses of the audience, especially the very useful comments and criticisms of Rachel Dwyer, Warnar Manski, and Cheryl Meritt have shaped the present version to a large extent.
- 2 For those familiar with my work, I should clarify that the idea of authenticity used here has a more limited meaning and is close to the idea of genuineness. It does not carry the associations derived from existential psychoanalysis in some of my other writings. See also Jacob (1985).
- 3 In an excellent article, Arjun Appadurai (1988) asks why a pan-Indian cuisine and ‘a complex gastronomic culture’ did not emerge in India. He gives a number of convincing reasons but does not consider the obvious one that cuisines are not obliged to follow cultural or national boundaries. India’s culinary zones change shades the way cultures and languages in the country do. Bengali cuisine is close to Maithili cuisine in Bihar because they are next-door neighbours, but the latter cannot but be the same as the Maithili cuisine in Nepal. It is a bit like the way a Calcuttan Bengali, speaking a version of Bengali that is used for public and literary purposes both in West Bengal and Bangladesh, can probably follow Bhojpuri better than the Bengali of Sylhet and Chittagong.
- 4 Madhur Jaffrey (1986) in her celebrated cookbook claims that due to caste proscriptions, a noteworthy restaurant culture did not develop in India till 1947. She also supports this argument with the claim that the first to enter the business were Punjabis who stressed Punjabi food and something she calls ‘vaguely North Indian “royal”’ (Jaffrey, 1986: 12). This is patently absurd. The three so-called presidency towns, particularly Calcutta and Bombay, already had well-developed restaurant cultures by the end of the 19th century.
- 5 The small Central European state of Luxembourg has only two Indian restaurants. The better known one is run by a Nepali, who too dutifully serves excellent eastern Indian and Nepalese food and mediocre Mughal-Punjabi fare. When I asked him why, he said, ‘The clients expect tandoori preparations when they come to an Indian restaurant’.
- 6 In cultures where a clear division between festive and everyday food exists, the former is usually richer, spicier, and includes more meat and fish preparations. One consequence of social mobility is often a shift to festive food as a part of everyday life, a shift that

partly explains the dramatically higher rates of cardiovascular ailments among expatriate, successful Indians in the First World.

7 See for instance, Dipesh Chakrabarty (1996) and Nandy (2001).

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