

**Exploring the Power of Food as a Vehicle of Identity and Ethnicity:
A Study of the novel "The Hundred-Foot Journey" (2010) written by Richard C. Morais and
the Film Adaptation (2014) of the same directed by Lasse Hallström.**

K. Unnamalai, I Year MA in English with Communication Studies

=====
Introduction

Food, like language, exists as a vehicle for expressing culture. It has the power of being both a biological necessity as well as a deeply symbolic cultural artefact, the one that connects us to one another on several levels. It is stated to be agreeable that "food is a mechanism for expressing an identity that also has a social purpose.". The scholar Robin Fox argues that are food choices serve to symbolize how we define ourselves in terms of religion, ethnicity, social class and so on. That is not to say that food and identity are static, which is evidenced by the current phenomenon of globalization that has increased human interaction and the overlapping of cuisines. The powerful act of food sharing involves simple everyday foods to extravagant ritual foods, to be inherently layered with meaning for cultures throughout the globe.

The Theory of Food Culture and the Neurocognitive Adaptation Criticized Over the Novel

The theory of Food culture involves common foods prepared often which varies across cultures and plays a major role in defining culture as well as identity. Individual cultures often see their everyday foods to be ordinary and plain that they are unworthy of study, but these foods often give not only insight into the cultures they belong to, but also to the foods and palates of outsiders of that culture. Cultures can both shape and are shaped by the foods they eat and the foods they consider to be stapled. The everyday foods can illustrate cultural identity, they can also create a space for individual identity as well.

The "Food" has unique histories related to their Preparation, production, consumption, and ultimately how they are used as vehicles to express identity. The themes of food fusion, the classifications of every day vs. ritual or seasonal foods, and the manifestation of cuisines like Haute, Molecular, Oriental, Continental, French and so on outside of their sphere of origin will stand as the guiding principles which delve into studying a diverse set of cultures. "The Hundred-Foot Journey" seeks to find how food retains its ability to act as a mechanism of identity and establishing cultural, ethnic, spiritual, and social belonging. The paper takes on a culinary journey of the globe, making stops infusion of Indian and French cuisines.

"The Hundred-Foot Journey" is an experiential narrative of Hassan Haji, who is a born chef of middle age. He recounts his life's journey from his family's modest restaurant in Mumbai to his

elegant restaurant in Paris where he conquered the insular world of French Haute Cuisine. A tragedy at home in Mumbai pushes Hassan's boisterous family into a picaresque journey across Europe, where they ultimately settle opposite a famous chef, Madame Mallory, in the remote French village of Lumiere. After a series of hilarious cultural mishaps, the grand French chef discovers, much to her horror, that the young boy cooking in the cheap Indian restaurant across the way is a chef with natural talents far superior to her own. A culinary war ensues, full of plot twists, pitting Hassan's Mumbai-toughened father against the imperious Madam Mallory, a battle *royale* that finally reveals to young Hassan his true destiny in life. The novel filled with eccentric characters, vivid settings, and delicious meals, Hassan's charming tale lays bare the inner workings of the elite world of French haute cuisine. In the process, however, Hassan also discovers a truism that bedevils any man who has got out into the world to make his mark, the true costs of rising to the top are only revealed later in life.

In the narration of Hassan's life at Mumbai, the protagonist is so close to his mother from whom he learnt his style of Indian cooking with spirited flavours of Indian spices. His mother taught him the cultivation of taste in the food preparation which gives away the taste of Indianness.

Hassan tangles between his own identity and ethnicity as an Indian cook well-known the spirit of flavours which seen in the lines "Life has its own flavour hidden in a nutshell", Hassan's Ethnicity as a cook gave him an education for all his senses. His school of learning as a cook started from his childhood in Mumbai restaurant where he has learnt to prepare meat with the spices and herbs giving away Indian flavours. It was a cuisine of 200 years old which his mother passed on to him as a generation's authority. She taught him the preparation and the cultivation of the taste in *Caviar, Sea Urchin, Machli and on*. The travel towards his dream to become a chef to serve all apart the cultures made Hassan make a culinary journey of an Indian cook to become a grand chef of the "Le Saule Pleureur", the French restaurant of Madam Mallory.

The cultural mishaps made Hassan find his own identity as a chef, the theory of food culture is brought into the learning process in Haute Cuisine, a classic Fusion cooking where he tries to convince his father who was obsessed with his Indian spices. Hassan has a passion for innovation and taste where his education cultivated the taste for all his senses. The fusion of Indian Spices like "Dhania, Elaichi, Saumph, Adarak, Laung, Kalonji, Dalchini and Madras Masala, Haldi and on..." along with the Five mother French sauces " *Béchamel (milk-based sauce, thickened with a white roux), Espagnole (a fortified brown veal stock sauce, thickened with a brown roux), Velouté (light stock-based sauce, thickened with a roux or a liaison, a mixture of egg yolks and cream), Hollandaise (an emulsion of egg yolk, butter and lemon or vinegar), Tomate (tomato-based)*" in the meat, truffle or even the sausages of the meat, battles with the taste buds. The conversation between Madam Malory and Hassan portrays the Fusion Food exploration where the food culture is evident as a theory, beautifully cooked through the essence of the lines woven by the author as:

"What is this flavour that is fighting against the chicken?

I added some spices to flavour to the sauces, and coriander for garnish and freshness.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 19:1 January 2019

Editors: Dr. V. Sangeetha, Dr. B. J. Geetha, Dr. K. Sindhu, Dr. S. Boopathi and Ms. S. Sneha Sri

Food in Literature: Papers Presented in National Seminar on Food in Literature, 2019

K. Unnamalai, I Year MA in English with Communication Studies

Exploring the Power of Food as a Vehicle of Identity and Ethnicity

266

*But why change a recipe that is 200 years old?
Because, madam, maybe 200 years is long enough”*

Towards the last part of the story, Hassan reaches two Michelin stars for the French restaurant where he is called at La Baleine Grise, the very highest level of the Cuisine Restaurant in Paris for Fusion Food and experimental food combinations. Hassan reaching his final stage to achieve his third Michelin star battling to create his own recipe along to prove his identity found his true love in the tastes of spices and innovation in them to make dishes with “*petals cooked in hay-infused chamomile, Cauliflower Ice-cream with a skim of egg yolk and capers, the appearance of Coriander, Fenugreek and masala, glutinous sauce resonant of tandoori, with a marinade of tamarind and smoked chilli, the oysters with nitropearls of sturgeon and oyster dust made exceptional by the addition of ground cardamom seeds, the sugar-coated beetroot with carrots, also garam masala a molecular cuisine, all appear to have discovered the spice of life.*” The above lines bring out the fusion Food culture where finds his own identity as a Chef de cuisine, a culinary star.

Sidney Mintz has shown how the Food culture’s symbolic meanings change with different cultural, ethnic and class considerations. Food, geography or place and identity are intertwined from a symbolic perspective. Wenying Xu makes the important perspective that food is one of the ways that we engage with, and understand, other cultures: “Food operates as one of the key cultural signs that structure people’s identities and their concepts of others.”

"Up here, Cooking is no longer an art but it's a science. At La Baleine Grise, we believe that eating is a multi-sensory experience, and a certain combination of flavours and aromas activate enzymes and stimulate specific parts of the brain, evoking pleasure, and also recollections of pleasurable experiences. Like a certain scent will remind you of your first love. This is the beast with a thousand mouths, that must be fed twice a day, and what does the beast like? Innovation... Innovation...INNOVATION. "These lines bring out the Neuro-Cognitive adaptation of Hassan to find a way to own himself. The Neurocognitive adaptation is a way of life where a person adapts oneself with the new place and surrounding to create an identity of one's own, where one diverges from their ethnic culture and tries to intertwine and fuse to create a new self.

Globalization, in combination with other forces, has created a global food system that has advanced distribution capabilities and the rate at which foods change contexts; but understanding how these forces come into play can be challenging. Kayatzyna J. Cwiertka has produced a series of works focused on understanding these forces. Cwiertka asserts that "the ways new foods become distributed as luxuries, curiosities, necessities, or status enhancers are described through the lens of modernization" (Cwiertka, 2008, pg. 409). The modernization of common food preparation or the occasional foods are at one lens that will help understand how the meanings of food change as they are distributed. These processes can also be viewed in terms of Food Culture and Neuro Cognitive adaptation. Expressions of culinary authority, and innovation claim ownership of culture, convey authenticity and even promote national identity and finally, the authority of food takes over its rule.

Conclusion

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 19:1 January 2019

Editors: Dr. V. Sangeetha, Dr. B. J. Geetha, Dr. K. Sindhu, Dr. S. Boopathi and Ms. S. Sneha Sri

Food in Literature: Papers Presented in National Seminar on Food in Literature, 2019

K. Unnamalai, I Year MA in English with Communication Studies

Exploring the Power of Food as a Vehicle of Identity and Ethnicity

Thus, the paper provides instances and it revolves around the Food Culture and Neurocognitive adaptation where the protagonist, Hassan Haji explores his authority or the power of food as a vehicle to own his self and a create a new one. The owing of oneself portrays one's cultural ethnicity and creating a one displays one's personal identity which is completely visualized through the exotic lines woven by Richard C. Morais in his gastric style of narration and picturized in the movie adaptation of the novel "The Hundred-Foot Journey".

Works Cited

- Almerico, Gina M. "Food and identity: Food studies, cultural, and personal identity ." *Journal of International Business and Cultural Studies Vol.8* (June 2014).
- Cwierotka, Katarzyna. "Modern Japanese Cuisine: Food, Power and National Identity." *Journal of Japanese Studies, Vol. 34, No. 2* ((Summer, 2008),): pp. 406-410.
- Lane, Christel. *The Cultivation Of Taste*. New York, United States of America.: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Lee, Cammy. "I Eat; Therefore I Am: Constructing Identities Through Food." 2015.
- Mackley, Lesley and Sallie Morris. *Cook's Encyclopedia of Spices*. Leicestershire, UK: Hermes House, 2011.
- Mannur, Anita. *Culinary Fictions: Food in South Asian Diasporic Culture*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt.Ltd, 2013.
- Morais, Richard C. *The Hundred-Foot Journey*. Noida, Uttar Pradesh, India: Harper Collins Publishers India, 2010.
- Parveen, Razia. "Food to remember: culinary practice and diasporic identity." *Oral History, Vol. 44, No. 1* (SPRING, 2016): 47-56.
- Stajcic, Nevana. "Understanding Culture: Food as a Means of Communication." *HEMISPHERES Vol.28 PL ISSN 0239-8818* (2013).
- Tebben, Maryann. *Sauces: A Global History*. London, UK: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2014.
- Fox, Robin. "Food and Eating: An Anthropological Perspective." *Social Issues Research Centre*. Ed. SIRC. SIRC, n.d. Web. 1 Oct. 2014. < HYPERLINK "<http://www.sirc.org/publik/foxfood.pdf>" <http://www.sirc.org/publik/foxfood.pdf> >.

K. Unnamalai
I Year MA in English with Communication Studies
Department of English
CHRIST (Deemed to be University)
Hosur Road, Bengaluru - 560029
k.unnamalai@eng.christuniversity.in