

Introduction

The papers assembled in this volume investigate food in India and Sri Lanka for its wide-ranging cultural meanings and uses. The special focus is on the cultural essence and experience foods evoke among Indians.¹ Several papers discuss the issue of food essence and aesthetics, with special attention to Hindu saints and the divine, where foods, firmly grounded in moral ideals and practice, represent a cosmic, divine principle at one level and a most immediate and intimate semiotic reality at another.² Food in India involves cultural characteristics not commonly associated with food in the contemporary West,³ for the subject routinely concerns matters of this world as well as the otherworld. Food is integral to India's cultural philosophy, since it comprehensively reflects the essence and experience of Indians at personal and collective levels. Food in India is never merely a material substance of ingestion, nor only a transactional commodity. It is synonymous with life and all its goals, including the subtlest and the highest. Sometimes highly abstract (approximating the linguistic, aesthetic, and even non-transactional or supratransactional "grammars") and sometimes palpably tangible (as a physical substance and "bodies"), this food asserts such a life-guiding presence that it concerns, one way or another, the thought and practice of the entire Indic civilization.

No wonder that such a conception of food is conducive to producing a comprehensive semiotics and semantics of food. There is widespread common understanding that foods in India routinely grade people's caste rank, help cure ailments, and reflect innate personal dispositions and spiritual pursuits and attainments. In its sweep and depth, food in India affords the Indianist a cultural lens to see beyond such basic dichotomies of his analysis as the ideal and the practical; self, body and the other; and abstract and concrete.

However, since our subject—a systematic study of food as a comprehensive cultural language—is still in initial stages, a suitable background discussion is needed for approaching the subject.

Once we have that, we will first identify those major cultural ways in which food plays a pivotal role for the expression and communication of the Hindu world and its distinctness, and second comment on how the papers of this volume illustrate a few aspects of the Hindu's comprehensive approach to food.

Food as a Subject of Study

Recent studies of food and culture in India repeatedly demonstrate that the varied properties of "eating and feeding" proceed according to one's social rank, customary rituals, sectarian values, and even implicit philosophical positions (e.g., Dumont 1980; Marriott 1968, 1976; Khare 1976b; and Khare and Rao 1986). In this way, the Indian food routinely produces a "semantic density" (to use Edwin Ardener's [1982, 1–12] phrase) of its own, often to comment on Hindu cultural expression and communication of the worldly or the otherworldly. We thus encounter a comprehensive cultural language that food develops with the help of "event richness" and "simultaneities" in meanings. All papers in this volume contribute toward such a discussion of food in India.

Our present discussion derives from the studies of food done earlier *in situ*—within caste, ritual, kinship, and traditional economics. What such traditional accounts and ethnographies offer us provides the necessary background for launching the next phase of food studies. If the earlier research repeatedly tells us that food is socially crucial within the Indian's world, we now systematically explore the issue of how Indians communicate about themselves, and their aesthetics and worldview with foods in a distinct—and uniquely comprehensive—way. If foods, in such a view, become clusters of moral expressions and meanings, they also reflect the constraints of the practical world and the imperatives of personal survival, on the one hand, and spiritual liberation, on the other.

A sociological initiative in such a direction was reflected in the studies of McKim Marriott, who employed "food transactions" as a primary explanatory device for discussing the internal organization of village caste ranking (Marriott 1968). In several studies, Marriott expanded on the Hindu logic of food transactions to grasp the more general cultural "construction" of the Hindu world and cosmology (Marriott 1959, 1976, 1989; Marriott and Inden 1977). Though his later attempts virtually abandon explicit reliance on food transactions, he started on this road with help of the example

of intercaste food handling. The example perhaps allowed Marriott to conceive of the Hindu world as a "flow of substances" (e.g., Marriott 1987; 1989).

Though a distinct advancement over the earlier *in situ* food studies, Marriott's approach still does not accord food that comprehensive attention which the Indian and his world demand. In this volume, we argue that the Indian food system has much to reveal if we approach it as a subject of study by itself and test its explanatory powers across wide-ranging contexts. This, in turn, necessitates a brief review of some recent food-focused studies. The prewar, or early, phase of food studies in India mostly appeared within heterogeneous administrative reports and monographs produced on different "castes," "tribes," and administrative "districts" of India. Among the early exceptions would be Charlotte Viall Wiser's *The Foods of a Hindu Village of North India*, completed in 1936 and published in 1937, as a part of the studies of the Bureau of Statistics and Economic Research of the United Provinces. Similarly, for good knowledge of indigenous scholarship on the Hindu tradition and everyday life, one may mention C. Auddy's *The Diet of the Ancient Hindus*, published in Calcutta in 1916; A. K. Sarcar's *The Food and Dietary Customs of the Ancient Indians*, published in 1929; and J. C. Roy's *Food and Drink in Ancient Bengal*, published in 1948. A more systematized account of food in classical texts appeared with Prakash (1961).

Of these, Wiser's study comes nearest to what we now call the "anthropology of food and nutrition," for it anticipated some developments of the seventies. Such early studies require a systematic review as much for our better understanding of Hindu gastronomy as for recognizing a crucial place of the interdependence between Hindu diet and health (e.g., the Ayurvedic-Unani-Homeopathic complex of popular medicine in India consider dietary control to be integral to any effective treatment).

The recent phase, starting with the sixties, increasingly produced *field-based* inquiries on such subjects as vegetarianism (e.g., Sharma 1961; Khare 1966) and "food offerings" to the deities (e.g., Yalman 1969). Such attempts explicated a sociocultural institution, principle, value, or worldview in terms of food handling. The approach still continues in various ways within anthropology, only with increasing diversity of analytic concerns (e.g., on food and political relations, Appadurai 1981; on food and historical changes in a regional political economy, Breckenridge 1986; on food's place in regional socioreligious organization, Cantlie 1984; on food in

temples, rituals, myths, literature, and popular culture, Ferro-Luzzi 1977, 1985; and on food practices under migration, Rao 1986). Several studies of the food system in India began in the seventies. They treated food as a cultural construction and made it a dominant subject of analysis in all of its complexity. Some called it the "anthropology or comparative sociology of food and food problems" (Douglas and Khare 1979). Concerned with comprehensive food, food policy, nutrition and hunger studies, investigators of this persuasion are consolidating their work, especially within American anthropology. Such studies either feed back into sociocultural analyses and perspectives, or develop into distinct nutrition and hunger-study specialties (for a sense of the range of studies already going on in this field, see Messer 1983).

A comment on these new developments and their value to our interpretive approach is in order. Under extreme domination, trauma and torture, food control becomes the prime weapon for determining others' survival. To the survivor, food becomes the dramatic minimum, with powerful psychological and social consequences. Appropriate accounts of the impact of extreme hunger on the human body, conducted from several directions, illustrate the controlling force of food on culture (e.g., Ruth 1987; Ngor 1987; Szymusiak 1986; and Scarry 1985). Though we lack such studies on India, we know that moral criteria every day crowd the issues of the food, physical body, and self-identity of the Indian (e.g., besides the Hindus, see Mahias 1985, on the Jains; Murphy 1986, for the Muslim feasting and fasting).

As I shall propose later on, cultural studies of food need not ignore the wide-ranging issues of policy and praxis, from food as commodity within regional histories to the current issues of international political rights to food and the problems of distributive justice. Anthropological research can contribute to such "critical" food studies, once we give the needed attention to the "entitlement" and "the right to food" debates (e.g., see Sen 1981, 1984; Tilley 1983; and Alston and Tomasevski 1984). And thus we also address the issue of food's shaping of culture. The purpose of mentioning such a direction of research is more than incidental for our volume: it relates to a deep-seated value conflict within the Indian system—the fact of unequal entitlements to food, on the one hand, and the ideal of morally just access to food by all creatures, on the other (Khare 1976b). In order to handle such internal conflicts, the Indian, especially the Hindu, draws upon the internal dynamics of his cultural ideology. If we consider the three major models of the Hindu "essence and ex-

perience” of food (chapter 7 in this book), we find that such models and meaning systems produce three correspondingly distinct but overlapping discourses—ontological and experiential, transactional and therapeutic, and world-critical (see section IV). To concern ourselves with the “semiotics” of Hindu foods is often to deal with a combination of these discourses for one significant reason or another.⁴ But before we can discuss these, we must briefly consider certain essential and distinct semantic properties of food within the Hindu world.

Self-Evident Truth

Food among the Hindus is “self-evident” because it is a dimension of none other than the Creator himself and is integral to the formation of cosmos. A cosmic (rather than anthropocentric) “logic” thus controls the production and circulation of food within creation, and it is a manifestation of Brahman, the ultimate Reality, as the Upanishadic sayings assert (see chapters 7 and 8 in this volume). It is ideal and material at once. It therefore does not admit such Western dichotomies as code and substance, symbol and reality, and ideal and practical. To the Hindu, food also does not “represent” Brahman, but it is actually a part of this ultimate reality, Brahman. In this world and beyond, the cosmic moral order (*dharma*) regulates the availability of food to all creatures. Hindus regard such a truth as self-evident, requiring no further proof and admitting no doubts. When body and self are concerned, food is considered as one of the five “sheaths” (*annamayakośa*) which “clothes” the soul (*jīva*; the other four sheaths being those of life-breath, mind, understanding, and bliss). Thus, food directly matters to the formation of a Hindu’s inner being and its becoming from one birth to the next.

Defined by such a distinct cultural ideology, food is “meaningful” to the Hindu throughout his life. As we know, multiple schemes of food classification establish the rules about *appropriate* eating and feeding practices (for some classical rules, see Manu IV, 205–225; V, 5–56; for an ethnographic description of some food practices among the Hindus, see Khare 1976a; for intercaste food transactions within a village, Marriott 1968). The general message of such an approach to food and food transactions seems unmistakable: one must specify as many contexts, conditions, and qualities of foods to be eaten (or not to be eaten) as possible, because the internal states of one’s being, within this world and beyond, remain

intimately connected to the moral quality and condition of what one eats. Whatever one eats has manifest and hidden, and immediate and remote, consequences on one's body and being (Manu IV and V; Kane 1974, chaps. 21–22). Food in India is therefore never simply a material substance; it is never only what the eyes see. The unseen karma and dharma of the giver and receiver energize it, circulate it, and color it.

Food thus exemplifies in India its multilayered semantic density. It is a moral (i.e., dharma-ordained) substance, a semiotic field, and a comprehensive “discourse” (i.e., a “text of meaningful actions” in Paul Ricoeur’s sense; Ricoeur 1981). Thus if food expresses the cosmic truth, showing its ultimate control by the dharma-based principles of cosmic creation and maintenance, it also expresses itself with intricate social-ritual (and karma-dharma) distinctions, classifications, and customary actions, releasing discourses on meaningful action concerning how food, body, and self need to be handled in each other’s terms to achieve the Hindu goal of liberation. However, this picture remains incomplete unless we also note that, despite such elaborate schemes, food still retains for the Hindu unpredictable (even mysterious) consequences, and thus requires ever more vigilance in its handling. This character of food is in some important ways a “limitless field” where language, speech, and action continuously work in each other’s terms.⁵ Once we become used to approaching food within such an expanding paradigm of significance and interpretation, we will see how often major rituals centrally locate “food acts” and “events” because they extend, and even magnify what speech and action want to convey. Foods quickly absorb good as well as bad words and intentions, producing what mythologies and the popular culture abundantly illustrate as a concern with “cursed” and “blessed” foods (for example, see O’Flaherty 1976).

Such “speaking food” culminates in producing a non-dichotomous linkage between the Creator, body, and self (Nikhilananda 1963, 272, 275–276, for the *Taittiriya Upanishad*’s formulations of this link). Here food is at once an exhaustive moral product and a cosmic process, an ideal construct (i.e., popularly the *annadevatā*) as well as a “generative commodity” (*anna* or *annaja*). If hunger reminds us of the material food, Hindu food still demands that we treat it as a comprehensive moral language that is “partly interior, subjective and rooted in regularities of the human mind, and partly exterior, objective and rooted in materiality” (Ardener 1982, 10, for characterizing the nature of language).

Food is self-evident to the Hindu in another way. It is for the coveted pursuit of one's own liberation. Food here is the necessary "helper" until all exchanges *cease* between self (*prāṇa*), body, and the world; even the renouncer feeds himself until the absolute Brahman is realized. Within the worldly life (*samsāra*), however, food plays a double role—enlightening when approached with austerity and self-control and degrading when sought for sensual indulgence. Within the second frame, sensual food becomes a part of the hall of Māyā's mirrors, deluding and destroying the indulgent. Unscrupulous pursuit of food and eating in daily life is known to invite diseases and shorten life. Under extreme austerities (*tapas*), on the other hand, any eating is considered a hindrance.

Such a close and intense relationship of food to self (and its spiritual welfare) makes food a subject of "heightened intersubjectivity" among the Hindus, where they routinely take into account the moral backgrounds and powers of those who handle food. Food readily absorbs the qualities of its "carriers" or "feeders" (in Hindi *khilānēwālē*). If a saint renders food auspicious and blessed, an ordinary person's covetousness, accumulated karmas, ignorance, and moral lapses as surely taint it. Even a saint's lapse pursues him from one birth to the next, until rectified (for the case of Ravidas, see Khare 1984, 40–46; O'Flaherty 1976, 73–77).

Three Major Discourses

Based on the "thread-soul" ideology where food becomes simultaneously a moral and material essence, Hindu India pursues its comprehensive gastrosemantics in terms of three major cultural models and their corresponding discourses. The first discourse on food—ontological and experiential—is concerned with the cultural "givens" within the "worldly" sphere (including food's classifications, taboos, intrinsic qualities, normal meal patterns, dietary restrictions, and notions of sufficiency and insufficiency). It includes one's passage along the designated social-ritual phases (*varṇāśramadharmā*), on the one hand, and on a "path" of spiritual welfare (*atmakalyāṇa*), on the other. The second discourse—transactional and therapeutic—concerns itself with the maintenance and promotion of comprehensive body-soul "wellness" (including the prevention and cure of various diseases by diet and medicine) by recognizing interdependence among different intrinsic properties of foods, the eater and his actions of giving and receiving. The third

discourse—world-critical—shows the limits of the first two as it concerns itself with such ultimate issues as the reality or illusion of the world, and the roles (“inner,” or spiritual and “outer,” or physical) of foods in enhancing one’s spiritual knowledge (*jñāna*) and “inner sight” (*antaradṛṣṭi*) for attaining liberation (*mokṣa*).

The three food discourses, in other terms, are concerned with (a) worldly life and becoming, (b) healing and happiness, and (c) self-control and salvation. Each discourse deals with issues of cognition and experience, self and cosmos, and ideology and action. Each discourse is characterized by its own distinct praxis—the first does so by keeping the soul-Brahman principle at the center of all spiritual paths and pursuits (*yogas*); the second by following dietary and ritual regulations organized along one’s physical state and social stages in life (e.g., *varṇāśramadharmā*), for fulfilling dharma and achieving personal health and “wellness” (*svāstha* and *kalyāṇa*); and the third by pursuing fasting, austerities and renunciation for attaining liberation. Finally, and most importantly, the three discourses overlap and work interdependently within a Hindu’s life; they exhibit contextually varying distinctions—but no immutable dichotomies—along thought, feeling, and action.

In Indian sociology, the three discourses have been unevenly studied so far. At present we know most about the second discourse, and less about the first and the third. For these two discourses, often classical or other learned texts still best inform us how India develops its distinct gastrosemantic conceptions by linking the healing of body to the healing of soul, with a critical view of the worldly, the ephemeral, and the unjust (*adharmā*). Issues of justice and fair play, for instance, engage the classical lawgiver Manu as he enunciates the basic principles of food classification and hierarchical food use. He deals with issues of social priority in food distribution, justifying his hierarchical view of moral justice and fair play (for the basic internal structure of the discourse, see Manu IV, 205–225; V, 5–56).⁶ Manu of course does not see hierarchy and justice as mutually incompatible. His ultimate authority for rendering the conception and distribution of food unequal-but-just resides with the Creator:

The Lord of Created beings (*Prajāpati*) came and spake to them, “Do not make that equal, which is unequal. The food of that liberal (usurer) is purified by faith; [that of the] other [man] is defiled by a want of faith” (Manu IV, 225).

The contemporary Hindu's food discourse is often an ambiguous critique of this foundational structure of the Hindu cosmic order. It remains ambiguous because, on the one hand, it renders hierarchy as unjust under the influence of modern values, and, on the other, keeps subscribing to the primacy of the traditional hierarchical order (e.g., in terms of the ideology of *varṇāśrama* model). Similarly, the contemporary Hindu's popular food values involve him in another anomaly as he constructs his personal and group identity on the superiority of vegetarianism. They conflict with the classical, Vedic values of meat eating. Vegetarianism, as the anthropologist well knows, defies a simple, consistent caste rank correlation (otherwise all Brahmans will only be vegetarians). Vegetarianism perhaps involves several rival historical forces and value paradoxes in Hindu ideology, pointing to us other properties of such food discourses.⁷

But such paradoxes only increase the force and subtlety of gastrosemantic discourses for the Indian. In foods reside all the major constituents and "essences" that cause physical ailments and influence personal temperament, emotional fluctuations, longevity, and salvation. With foods the Indian regulates his mental states and aesthetic feelings, and secures spiritual gains. To the spiritually adept, foods reveal as well as filter the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of others (and their own). The discerning know, as Mahatma Gandhi used to say, that food can either aggravate or subdue the primary sources of worldly bondage—anger, lust, greed, and infatuation.

Though the Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain on the subcontinent may largely continue to share the preceding profile of food praxis (and we have employed the word "Indian" in such a comprehensive sense), we must emphasize that each stakes a claim to a distinct philosophic ideology and "food culture." And this means that, once considered in detail, their gastrosemantic discourses will also be distinctly different. Thus, if food and eating constitute a "multi-form" but single Ultimate Reality to the Hindu, they are subjects of severe austerity and denial for the Jains, and largely a practical matter of maintaining life (without extremes) for the Buddhist. If the Hindu approaches eating with self-control, the Jain finds eating ideologically risky (if necessary) and the Buddhist approaches it as a part of his "middle path".⁸ Still, for all the three, food may variously enter the issues of being and becoming, healing and social sharing, and self-discipline.

A Comprehensive Food Culture

The chapters assembled in this book may be better understood with the help of preceding three cultural discourses on Hindu food. The chapters concern themselves chiefly with two aspects—ritual and literary, especially as they are interrelated in India. Chapters predominantly concerned with religious matters, often deal with mythological figures, saints, householders, and the divine. Those concerned with literary and aesthetic aspects serve to underscore the breadth and depth of comprehensive expressions foods enjoy in India. They specifically show how the Hindu and the Buddhist convey their generally overlapping experiential, aesthetic and communicational richness within ceremonial as well as everyday life. All papers, together, approach food for its properties of wide-ranging presence, semiosis, circulation, and communication across the physical, human, and divine domains. Hindu saints, ritualists, and the divine particularly treat food as a bridge between this-worldly and otherworldly spheres, making it a ground for divine-pervading sensual and suprasensual experiences. Thus the Hindu's food (alongside his body) becomes one of the most exhaustive mediums within which the discerning realize the ultimate unity of the material and spiritual existence.

As an aesthetic experience, food also acquires distinct literary, culinary, worldly, and popular expressions. Open to the worldly, everyday experience, different foods and "food contexts" readily evoke wide-ranging sayings, common wisdom, and special feelings and moods. Not confined to the sacred and the profound, Indian food also expresses the ordinary and the witty. The sacred and the secular readily conflate, denying room for a rigid dichotomy or division between them. Further, as this volume attempts to deal with the learned and popular cultural meanings of food, and food contexts, it deals with a variety of "essences" and exchanges shared by the saintly and the divine, the sensual and the suprasensual, and the commonsensical, the poetic, and the ironical.

The chapters of this book are arranged to reflect a complementary relationship between ritual, mythological and literary properties India variously assigns to food. Though dominated by the sacred, the ritual easily slips into the domains of "common knowledge," the secular and the practical (and vice versa; see chapters 6 and 8 in this volume). However, to familiarize the reader with major shared rules, meanings and actions of the Indian world, we start with the rich and varied roles saints, sadhus, sages, and devotees

have played in increasing the signifying power of food in India. More than representation, such food evokes an universal essence and triggers vast experiences—poetic, intuitive and mystical.

Khare, White and Aklujkar substantiate this issue in different ways as contemporary saints, mythological sages, and medieval saint devotees employ food to pattern their crucial communications with devotees (Khare), share intimacies with the divine (Aklujkar), and play out status conflict among themselves as antagonists (White). If the ritual, semiotic and experiential aspects concern Khare's paper, White's mythological material draws attention to status via edible and abominable foods, especially as the spiritual and temporal powers collide for domination. Aklujkar's Maharashtrian saints complement this conflict model by juxtaposing to it the power of divine love and the divine-devotee intimacy. They celebrate the food which communicates oneness as well as multiplicity, intimacy and (or denial of) hierarchy, and knowledge and experience. They express with food their exalted, unifying devotional attitudes and worldviews, on the one hand, and messages of social reform (or protest), on the other.

Such a range of concerns introduces what Khare calls the "semantic density" of the holy person's food. At the center is the cultural logic of "conjoining" several "gastrosemantic triangles" (e.g., food, body and self or *ātman*), establishing multiple appropriate interrelationships between the inner and the outer, spiritual and material, and general and particular. Pursuing two cardinal cultural formulations—you are what you eat, and you eat what you are—Khare finds that the Hindu sages, sadhus, and yogis have evolved a comprehensive gastrosemantic discourse according to their spiritual "paths" (*mārga*) and associated philosophies. The chapter, then, demonstrates the "conjoining logic" of Hindu foods, where semanticity and the semiotic productivity of food are corroborated for a range of cultural situations—from the Ayurvedic to the Tantric, to even the contemporary Gandhian.

Concerned with textual (often mythological) materials, White's exercise specifically focuses on a Kṣatriya sage's (Viśvāmītra's) dog-eating abomination and its prolonged consequences for his controversial quest for a Brahman sage's status. White amplifies on the long-recognized "inner conflicts" between asceticism and caste status within the Hindu world and food's crucial role in them. Framed by the polar opposition between the abominable "dog-cookers" (*śvapacas*) and the cow-worshipping Brahman sages (*brahmaṛṣis*), and engaged in prolonged status battles between the

Brahmanic authority of Vasiṣṭha and the ascetic power of the dog-eating Viśvāmitra, the story allows White to investigate the underlying ambiguous “rhetoric” which food produces within the Hindu world. Do sages really become what they eat?

While the orthodox traditions answer the question in the affirmative, the heterodox movements dispute such a resolution. They have produced mediating concepts (e.g., a Kṣatriya renouncer—*rājarṣi* like Viśvāmitra), on the one hand, and, as White shows with mythological evidence, anomalous conditions (Trisāṅku’s bodily transfer to heaven), on the other. Corroborating a quality of Hindu gastrosemantics, White notes how “food” (milk, cow, dog, cooking and eating, and forcing others to eat and drink abominations) yields within his study “so many rhetorical expressions for the tensions inherent to the processes of pollution, purification and redemption in a hierarchized society.” As Viśvāmitra, in distress, justifies saving his life by eating the hind quarters of a dog, he exemplifies for the ordinary Hindu defensible limits of permissible behavior during dharma-in-crisis (*āpaddharma* or *dharma saṁkata*), on the one hand, and a relentless pursuit of asceticism for acquiring superior spiritual (and *varṇa*?) status, on the other.

If food thus becomes a crucial rhetoric for expressing status and power conflicts with two famous mythological sages, Maharashtrian saints approach food for substantializing the power of divine love, carving out a distinct form of “feasting” (emotional, literary, and spiritual) to let food aesthetics and poetics create each other. Aklujkar shows how such “feasting” occasions a wide variety of aesthetic and literary expressions, characterizing intimacies of deity and devotee. Such a food flouts normal social rules by valuing love over hierarchy, informality over formality, and feeling over reason and rules. This chapter provides the climaxing Bhakti paradigm later saints (including Khare’s contemporary sadhus) have followed. Not only that, it links up with the paradigmatic *annakūṭa* feast of Krishna which Toomey analyzes as a “feast of love.” On such occasions, food yields waves of polyvocal discourses where status and love, transaction and nontransaction, and reason and emotion test each other’s limits. Riding waves of divine love, the Hindu experiences the extraordinary by handling food.

The next two chapters (Toomey and Moreno) extend the discussion of how love empowers food, body and life, especially in the presence of the temple-enshrined divine. Both chapters deal with gross (*sthūla*) and subtle (*sūkṣma*) properties of the divine body and divine leftovers (whether acceptable or unacceptable). However, while

Toomey places feasting food (*annakūṭa*) within some of the emotive moods of Vaiṣṇava devotion and its spiritual aestheticism (*bhāvas* and *rasas*) in the north, Moreno deals with Lord Murukan's "food washings" (*pañcāmirtam*) as a material-Ayurvedic-aesthetic-divine substance (*rasa* or *rasam*). Once in contact with Lord Murukan of the south, these washings "become" him. Both contributors remain careful not to oversimplify the messages (gross and subtle) the food thus creates for the devotee and his world.

Toomey's discussion of the *annakūṭa* feast as a "mountain of food" and a mountain of love illustrates the ideal of reciprocal love. In his words, the feast is a "gastrohyperbolism," a reversal of the ascetic model of food, yielding "meta-communicative effects," where, as a Krishna's devotee had remarked, "we share everything with everybody." The semiotics of the "mountain of food" (*annakūṭa*) builds on a homologous, metonymic prism—Krishna, Govardhan hill, and the *annakūṭa*, where each refracts on the other two, producing a three-way "mirroring" among Krishna, hill, and food. Krishna is the hill, as well as being beside it, in a "split or double image" (as Toomey's lithograph, figure 4.1, shows). Though sensuality within Krishna's devotion has a specialized conceptual character and development, it does not exclude popular-cultural characterizations, where a Krishna's devotee is a *masta* (i.e., essentially an informal, carefree, and uninhibited) person, and therefore often a glutton as well.

The *annakūṭa* feast has a formal and an informal face, varying with the sectarian differences of the devotees (i.e., along the Vallabhite and Caitanyaite sects) and reflected by Krishna's iconic and aniconic forms and the sect-prescribed modes of food offering. In the Vallabhite setting, which is formal and hierarchical, the regal child Krishna takes 95 minutes to eat the enormous meal in seclusion, while his informal ("natural" or aniconic) counterpart, the "lotus mouth" (or a crack) in the Gobardhana hill, is the instant enjoyer (*rasika*) of his devotee's food, before everybody. But either way, Krishna enjoys such abundant faith and love from his devotees via abundant food that the feast directly "becomes" (in quality and quantity) his body and his divine grace.

The divine body in Moreno's chapter acquires a distinct material (and pragmatic) emphasis. Besides feeding, he is concerned with divine washings and leftovers because they renew and revitalize the devotee's body. As Moreno observes, to consume the deity's leftovers (including washings) is not only to experience the divine within, but it is also "to regenerate certain lost qualities in

[devotees'] bodies, so that slowly they become more like the body of the god." Not unlike Krishna's mediation of the natural hill (gross) and the spiritual love (subtle) at the Mount Govardhana, Murukan, "the essence (*rasam*) of the hills," concerns himself with the body and well-being of the devotee.

Taking a distinct "substance-altering," healing view of the deity's body (after McKim Marriott's ethnosociology), Moreno finds Murukan made up of nine metalloids and various herbs, along with the poisons that carry healing and restorative powers. The god becomes the "doctor of the dark age," where the god's body, with appropriate food offerings and washings, is kept in "thermic" balance (i.e., a balance of heat and cold along the seasonal variations). Caste groups reflect this scheme of "substance"-based distinctions, Moreno tells us, by assigning among themselves distinct thermic characteristics. God, food, *therme*, caste, and life enter into mutually reinforcing relationships here to corroborate the "substance flow." And such a discussion of God-food (*pañcāmirtam*), for the purposes of this book, also remains cognitive, intersubjective, and expressive (like Toomey's), though the chosen markers are different. Moreno's account relegates the faith, emotion, and otherworldly pursuits (*sraddhā*, *bhāva*, and *adhyātama*) of the devotee in the background in order to focus on a particular "science" of "substance flow."

Such a language not only interrelates the divine body with the human but renders the former in terms of the latter. Our concern increases with the constitution and healthy functioning of the human body, bringing a focus on the primary constituents and Ayurvedic humors—*guṇas* and *doṣas*. Seneviratne's paper allows such a discussion within a changed context (Sinhalese Buddhists of Sri Lanka) and a changed (practical, everyday) ethics and aesthetics. (Yet there is *no* break with the rest of the book because Seneviratne skillfully builds on a basic *sharing* between Buddhist and Hindu notions of food, body, Ayurveda, and the related aesthetics.) Sinhalese meals involve "moments of perfect aesthetic appreciation," showing how the Ayurvedic and culinary qualities (*guṇas* alongside *rasas*, *dhātus* and *doṣas*—flavors, essences and humors) constitute a language of essential coherence. The Sinhalese Buddhist demonstrates this property best as he relates food cooking within one's house (external) to that within one's body (internal). Cooking and digestion unify diverse foods; spicy cooking, as Seneviratne puts it, "unifies the separateness inherent in the raw items." The Buddhist food aestheticism, though philosophically so

different from the devout Hindu saint's, still converges on a shared sense of intersubjectivity and reflexivity as it locates flavor in foods and meditative bliss in flavors.

The preceding chapters variously depict a range of cultural essence, experience, and meaning the Indian foods convey. Though by no means representative of the entire Hindu "food culture," they show how two main frames of analysis (drawn from social science and humanities) intertwine within India's gastronomy: If one deals with diversity in terms of a few primary cultural principles and models, the other directly celebrates the diversity of gastronomic rites, aesthetics, and literary expressions (learned and popular). The last two chapters of the book illustrate two general interpretive exercises.

Khare focuses on certain dominant cultural models and meanings that constitute the "essence" and experience of Hindu foods.⁹ Thus, the Hindu's food, like his world, is found to be grounded within five elements, three strands, five senses, three humors, six savors, and nine feelings, to let the Hindu achieve his four goals of life (for a schematic discussion of such a multiple chain of distinctions, especially within a distinct philosophical—nondualist—frame, see Satprakashananda 1965, 315–334). To view food this way as a product of strings of "constituents" is also to see it as a karma-dharma evolute (*kendraja*), requiring ethical control and regulation every day in adult life. At another (subtle) level, the same constituents allow the Hindu to treat food as an entirely conceptual (*mānasika*) essence and supratransactional presence (or even a devotional attitude or *bhāva*; see Aklujkar's chapter). As a presence, food thus routinely—and "eternally"—passes from gross to subtle, and vice versa, within the Hindu universe.

Within the lived world, the Hindu awards multiple values to food by status (*varṇāśrama*) and "path" (*mārga*) values (elaborated further according to the criteria of personal faith and spiritual maturity). Such characterizations apply until the cosmic-moral essence of food is not personally "realized" as a part of one's spiritual progress. Ideally, there is no notion of food without such a cosmic scheme.

Defined by the preceding properties, Khare approaches Hindu food in terms of three cultural models—ontological and experiential (i.e., based on the "thread-soul" or *éktā*), transactional and therapeutic (karma-dharma or *anéktā*), and world-critical and world reforming (Bhakti-Shakti or *śraddhā*). These models help him to show how food, in essence, must *conjoin* this-worldly with otherworldly,

and sensual with suprasensual concerns. In evidence, as several chapters of this book show, innumerable Hindu sages, sadhus, poets, and wisemen (*jñāni-vijñāni*) have been prominent “synthesizers” of such models of food and their discourses.

On the other hand, Ramanujan arranges a “bouquet” of diverse contexts, markers, and figures of expression, identifying the Hindu’s “gastroaesthetics,” but again within a unified system of signification. He repeatedly illustrates how the Hindu forges interdependence and unity between this-worldly and otherworldly aesthetics and poetics. He treats food for its density of meanings—for its unlimited semiosis, and he adduces examples of moral metaphors and practical parables for their powers of semiosis—by denotation, connotation, and contextual suggestion. Showing how food metaphors expand into a shared discourse on gustatory and aesthetic “tastes” (*rasa*, *ruci*, and *asvāda*), he arrives at aesthetic discourses—learned and popular—in India that variously underscore a distinct, deep yogic principle—“experience is in the experiencer.”

With the help of preceding comments, we hope that the reader will discover numerous other shared affinities between any two (or any cluster of) chapters in this book. We may find India’s food conversing with us in several languages, acquiring a variety of faces and voices in a variety of conditions and criticisms of human condition. I allude to one development below.

Toward A New Turn: Critical Food Studies

India’s distinct models and experiences of food provide us with certain distinct properties of India’s cultural accounting of itself as a civilization. Food illuminates India’s ideality, morality, reflexivity, materiality, and cosmology in various ways, showing us the depth as well as sweep of such a scheme. Conjoining materiality, practice, and experience, food in Hindu India stamps one’s being and becoming; it runs through the personal, social, pragmatic, spiritual, and ideal domains, assuring the depth of meaning and purpose that the chapters of this book variously attest to. Food does not merely symbolize; it just *is* one of the self-evident truths on which the Hindu world rests.

Such a comprehensive formulation should benefit interdisciplinary food studies because it helps to enlarge and enrich our aspectual food descriptions, classifications, prohibitions, and transactions. As we found, food in India at once concerns “material and

health sciences,” layered meanings, intersubjective dialogues, emotional experiences, and multiple (and open-ended) cultural “texts” and their interpretations (learned and popular). Such food provides repeated clues to distinct characteristics of India’s “cultural reasoning.” Confined to the Hindu and the Sinhalese Buddhist food schemes, this book, however, by no means exhausts the range of “food discourses” in which India engages. There still are many other crucial directions and dimensions to account for. And one of the ways to conclude this introduction is perhaps to comment on another possible direction India’s food studies could take in the future.

Food is as much a subject for moral regulation and contemplation as a substance for ingestion to maintain life. If its handling necessitates transactions at one level, its essence resides at another level, in morally just (*dharma saṃgata*) availability to all creatures, and within the entire creation. Evaluated for dharma-ordained notions of justice in everyday life, food seldom is a decision-neutral cluster of symbolic-reflexive discourses (see the preceding discussion of the “third discourse”). It becomes a comprehensive moral-jural “text,” where different meanings of dharma, rights and obligations, unresolved personal dilemmas, and scales of practical priorities compete with one another. Such food engages us in issues of competing notions of just dharma and associated ethical-jural problems encountered within personal and collective life. White’s chapter on Viśvāmitra’s moral dilemmas as “dog-eater” comes nearest to considering such an issue.

A new aspect of critical food studies in India could thus be inaugurated if food were viewed as *more* than a customary (ritual or material) transactional commodity, to let the changing notions of the “just” and the “unjust” food (for hunger and survival) receive greater attention, with associated notions of (and debates on) distributive justice. We need to know about this aspect as much in classical and customary India as in contemporary times. The subsidized ration shops in modern India (for “fair” food distribution to the weak and the poor), on the other hand, demand that we critically examine assumptions of the internationalized Western ideology of economic individualism and egalitarianism (usually translated as “rights” and “entitlements” to food; e.g., Eide 1987; Sen 1981, 1984). Such a Western value scheme clearly assumes a different value basis for distributive justice than that produced by the dharma-karma forces of the Indic world. And yet as negotiations between the two distant positions go on in contemporary India, strategies of conflict as well as accommodation emerge every day, rendering food as that

moral-material “commodity” that continues to speak in the language of karma-dharma even as the political language of Western-style rights is learned for asserting personal security and survival. Such a step *expands and deepens* the Indian’s social, economic, and political communication via foods (for a general discussion of “linkages” between commodities and society, see Douglas and Isherwood 1979).

For India, we could start by examining notions of distributive justice (as a dimension of dharma and *nyāya*) in a wide variety of religious texts, history, and folklore. Anthropology could join the discussion by “writing” appropriate ethnographies on just and unjust notions of food (and hunger), and on the conditions (and justifications) of differential rights and entitlements to food. Some recent anthropological and philosophical critiques, once read with such a subject in mind, may encourage us to open food studies to recent critical cultural, political, and jural thought (e.g., see Marcus and Fischer 1986; Walzer 1983; Singh and Lele 1988).

Notes

1. The term “Indian” is used throughout to include the Sinhalese cuisine in a cultural, *not* political, sense. Its general conceptual affinity with Hindu food and the Ayurvedic system is equally striking, and H. L. Seneviratne, our contributor on the Sri Lankan Sinhalese food system, confirms such an overall sharing. For these reasons (but without erasing specific distinctions prevalent between the Hindu and the Sinhala), our usage of such words as “Indian,” “Hindu,” and “Sinhalese” in this book will emphasize a generally shared civilizational content and perspective on foods. Similarly, following other contributors, I continue to employ “Indian” to refer to the dominant Hindu or Hindu Indian cultural characteristics, though there is no intention to reduce India to Hindu society and culture.

Since food in India is a notoriously wide-ranging practical and philosophical subject, I must remark on another stipulation. When referred to as an abstract or cultural moral/collective construct, I use “the food” or “food” (in singular). Everyday diversity is usually indicated by “foods.” Other contributors vary, though all of them refer to both senses of food. One contributor (Moreno, chapter 5) even capitalizes the word to refer to India’s distinct philosophical notions of food. I purposely have not edited out this diversity of usage because I think it conveys a shared awareness in our analysis of food systems.

2. Explicated later on, “speaking food” encapsulates the cultural sense of a Hindi phrase (*anna pēta sē boltā hai*), which my informants—householders and saints—variously employed to refer to the fact that food yields

speech. Food is a “live” presence for him, with many faces, “tongues,” and meanings.

3. The issue is important enough in some ways to receive attention at this point. I particularly want to draw the reader's attention to the conceptual rather than practical or functional aspects of this distinction. India's frequent identification with food shortages, famines, and droughts may lead one to think that all this attention on food must be, after all, a consequence of India's longstanding food problems. The West, in contrast, has simply moved beyond such a phase and therefore shows a different attitude toward food—scientific when its production is concerned and casual when its distribution and everyday eating are concerned. Though there may be some historical truth in such a difference, when the recent past is concerned, the cultural approach to food in India, I suggest, has been distinct in some fundamental—ideological—ways. Food is not just a symbol *of or for* the cultural but it *is* integral to the Hindu's ultimate reality in the same way as “self” or “soul” is.

4. Charles Peirce's semiotics has recently attracted the attention of some anthropologists working on India (e.g., Singer 1984; Daniel 1984). Its analytic approach is generally found “suitable” to Indian culture. However, more work is needed to examine the “fit” between Peirce's schemes and India's own longstanding theories of logic, meaning, and epistemology. Exercises on food may help explicate more fully how Indian culture goes about interrelating syntactics, semantics, and pragmatics to each other, to produce context-dependent and context-free identities of self.

I prefer to use the term “semiotic” in a more general, dictionary sense to refer to “a general philosophy of signs and symbols” which deals with their functions and meanings in different “languages” (*Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* 1985, 1070).

5. Once interpreted in as general terms as intended by the Indian, “speech” (*vāṇī* or *bhāṣā*) stands for both *langue* and *parole*. Such speech, as the classical authorities always emphasized, closely guides and affects every act and every thing, including foods. For example, Manu (IV, 256) proclaimed, “All things (have their nature) determined by speech; speech is the root, and from speech they proceed; but he who is dishonest with respect to speech, is dishonest in everything.”

“Speech” in such a usage includes norms, good practice, intention, feeling, intuition, and insight. All of these together also shape the moral content and texture of food.

The chapters of this book variously argue that the Hindu food is a highly inclusive and sensitive cultural language, where the material and the symbolic, concrete and abstract, and the sensual and the suprasensual cannot be dichotomized. When such properties are distinguished by context, it is not at the expense of the underlying tendency toward the ultimate unity.

6. For an anthropological discussion of the point that discourses tend to engage in exerting and justifying a distinct form of control, see Parkin 1982, xlvi–xlviii.

7. Vegetarianism is a good example of how later Hindu culture reinterpreted the meat eating prevalent within the Vedic times and fashioned it as an ideological weapon for grading and justifying the practice among those socially near (as with the Brahmins and Kshatriyas of different regions), and downgrading and excluding those the “distant other.” For a recent analysis of meat eating and its “ecological placement” and medical use in Ayurveda, see Zimmermann 1987. As I have remarked elsewhere, from the point of view of those at the periphery (i.e., Sudras and Untouchables), vegetarianism proved to be a dual weapon—of social dominance as much as of spiritual self-discipline (Khare 1984).

Paradoxically, on the other hand, when a vegetarian Hindu knows that his ancestors practiced and promoted meat eating, he does *not* see sufficient reason for changing his vegetarian value preference. Classical India’s food values thus contradict those prevailing. Though, according to the traditional logic, the original practice should be the most authoritative guide, popular Hindu culture chooses to ignore such logic in favor of the prevailing preference. It is a clear case not only of reinterpretation but also of reaching and maintaining an opposite cultural judgment within a traditional order.

8. On the Buddhist position on food in different stages of life, I profited from a discussion with my colleague Professor H. L. Seneviratne, and he provided me with a general commentary on food within Buddhism.

9. My two chapters in this book, along with the “Introduction,” are presented as interrelated readings. They grew out of the paper originally prepared for the Mysore conference in 1985. Thus the gastrosemantic “triangles” discussed in the first chapter have unavoidable conceptual kinship with the three models of food essence and experience (*anna* and *annadevatā*), on the one hand, and with the three—ontological and experiential, transactional and therapeutic, and world-critical—discourses, on the other (chapter 8).

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