

Culinary Authenticity and Diaspora: A Preliminary Enquiry

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Abstract

Food has traversed across boundaries with the advent of globalization. Food from various countries is now accessible to people across the globe, irrespective of the vast difference in culture or taste. Exposure to new kinds of food has become commonplace since migration, food trade and marketing expanded. Diasporic groups who migrate for different reasons carry their culture along, that they either spread the same in the immigrant country or seek nostalgic relief through food, lifestyle, relationships etc. Nonetheless, the mother culture and corresponding food habits do travel with people, more so if their occupation is related to food. While that happens, there's always the burning question of authenticity of food. Some believe that a dish cooked by a native of a particular cuisine is authentic, some others consider use of traditional ingredients makes a dish authentic. In the context of globalisation, culinary ways, recipes and ingredients are borrowed and integrated across cultures. Due to these transactions, presuppositions on culinary authenticity are plenty and dynamic among stakeholders of the food industry, be it an immigrant consumer, culinary expert, food critic or a restaurateur. This paper attempts to study the various aspects concerning culinary authenticity and diaspora, analysing viewpoints of the stakeholders.

Keywords: culinary authenticity, diaspora, immigrant, aesthetics, restaurateur, cuisine, culture

1. Introduction

Over the past few decades, people have begun experimenting with their food habits occasionally. Food cultures have been integrated into different dining spaces. Some believe in searching for food has native flavours whereas some are open to fusion food wherein existing flavours and novel ideas meet. An Anthropologist, Arjun Appadurai, propounds thus in his article on national cuisine:

Food boundaries seem to be dissolving much more rapidly than marriage boundaries because eating permits a variety of registers, tied to particular contexts, so that what is done in a restaurant may be different from what is seen as appropriate at home, and each of these might be different in the context of travel, where anonymity can sometimes be assured. (Appadurai, 1988, p. 9)

Food being an innate part of any culture, evolves as the culture evolves. When an aspect of a food culture is altered by someone native to the culture, that change is accepted and adopted into the culture, without questioning if it taints the authenticity of that aspect. The changes carried out by any external factor outside native boundaries, such as a fusion food idea or merely addition of an ingredient from another culture is usually questioned for its authenticity. Evolving experiences of stakeholders and corresponding insights keep adding value to the dialogue on culinary authenticity.

In her work *Authentic British food products: a Review of Consumer Perceptions*, Angela Groves, an expert in Food Economics, says: "Regional culinary traditions incorporate unique personal touches and 'secret ingredients' into the recipe, highlighting the cook as much as the dish, and resulting in the virtual impossibility of defining the mythical 'authentic recipe.'" (2001, p. 246)

Considering the etymological understanding of the word 'authentic,' to call food authentic is elusive in logic. The word 'authentic' originated from the Greek word 'authentikos' that means 'principal/genuine' ("authentic"), is usually associated with any thing, place or food that derives from the place of origin or is prepared by the people who are known

for its existence. There is a certain exclusivity which is associated with anything that is labelled 'authentic,' which puts it to more scrutiny.

As per a recent survey titled 'The Evolving Indian Palate' conducted by the market research firm IPSOS, about 79% Indians cook Western food in their kitchens. 19% of them prefer it only for breakfast while 70% opt it as a replacement for Indian food owing to its ease in preparation. ("Pune Food Spot," 2019)

As Meredith Abarca, an expert in Food Narratives says: "Having authority and claiming knowledge when referring to a particular culinary method for a specific ethnic food, in and of itself, is not the problem. The problem arises when we consider what social settings exist to claim such authority." (2004, p. 3) A substantial idea that claims authorship or a concrete product that has a patent could have authenticity, when compared to an everyday perishable item like food whose development happens by the minute, depending upon the consumer's needs, taste and palate.

Kevin Alexander, a James Beard award-winning food journalist and recipient of the Society of Professional Journalist's Mark of Excellence Award, opines thus in his blog 'Why Authentic Food is Bullshit?':

...it is entirely useful for meals to have narratives, but when all is said and done, that end better be damn delicious. If the degree of authenticity overrides the imperative of taste, then there's a problem. The whole incentive system gets warped. Suddenly we're stuck with a galaxy of underwhelming expressions of cultural purity... (2016)

As new inventions emerge and grow, capitalistic tendencies to claim ownership to those inventions are also on the rise. Such tendencies have found their way into production and supply of something as rudimentary and quintessential as food.

2. Why Seek Authenticity in Food?

"Perceptions of authenticity are stronger where there is the presence of an authority. Bodies acting as an authority must be seen to be independent and credible and the assurance, they give must be easily recognizable and communicable," says Groves when she talks of the role of regional food groups and food-related marketing initiatives involved in food trade. (2001, p. 252)

Food trade is an ancient practice that involves trading of native ingredients across various countries. However, 'food' as such, denotes, dishes and recipes became a part of the trade during the early nineteenth century with the rise in cross-cultural cuisines that paved way for restaurateurs to establish their home cuisine-based eateries in other countries. However, the advent of cross-cultural restaurants was highly Eurocentric in nature.

During inception, most cuisines that were involved in the trade or migration of food cultures were the ones that belonged to hegemonically sound countries like Europe, America etc. Since their food was adopted to other countries during early times of food trade, questioning the authenticity of their food is not a predominant part of the conversation as that of a *nasi goreng* or a *paneer butter masala*. Elaborating further, authenticity of a pizza is not much sought after since it has become a quotidian food item that is readily available almost at every nook and corner of the world. So is the case of a cheeseburger.

3. Review of Literature

The concept of culinary authenticity is multifaceted, encompassing aesthetic, cultural, social, and global dimensions. Scholars and stakeholders alike engage in ongoing debates about what constitutes authentic cuisine, exploring themes of tradition, innovation, and identity. This literature review synthesizes key perspectives and findings in the field, providing a comprehensive overview of the theoretical frameworks and empirical studies that have shaped our understanding of culinary authenticity.

3.1 Aesthetic and Sensory Dimensions

Aesthetic considerations are central to the discourse on culinary authenticity. Scholars such as Johnston and Baumann (2010) argue that aesthetic judgments about food often hinge on notions of tradition and heritage. These judgments are not merely about taste but involve a deeper appreciation of cultural and historical contexts. For example, food criticism often emphasizes the importance of preserving traditional cooking methods and ingredients as markers of authenticity (Heldke, 2003).

The sensory experience of food, particularly taste, also plays a crucial role. According to Sutton (2001), the taste of a dish can evoke memories and emotions, making it a powerful determinant of perceived authenticity. This subjective perspective highlights the connection between familiarity and authenticity, suggesting that dishes resonating with one's personal or cultural background are often deemed more authentic.

3.2 Cultural and Diasporic Perspectives

The cultural significance of food is another important aspect of culinary authenticity. For diasporic communities, food often serves as a vital link to their homeland and cultural identity. Researchers like Appadurai (1988) have explored how immigrant communities maintain culinary traditions as a way of preserving their cultural heritage. These traditions can

be adapted to new environments, raising questions about how authenticity is defined and maintained in the diaspora.

Diasporic perspectives challenge static notions of authenticity by highlighting the dynamic and evolving nature of culinary practices. For instance, Long (2004) discusses how immigrant cuisines undergo transformation as they adapt to local ingredients and tastes, yet still retain a sense of authenticity rooted in cultural memory and identity.

3.3 Globalization and Culinary Fusion

Globalization has profoundly impacted culinary authenticity, as cultures increasingly interact and blend. Watson and Caldwell (2005) examine how global culinary exchanges create hybrid cuisines that challenge traditional notions of authenticity. These fusion foods often combine elements from different culinary traditions, reflecting broader trends of cultural hybridity and cosmopolitanism.

The acceptance and popularity of fusion cuisines indicate a shift in how authenticity is perceived. Instead of being tied to a single tradition, authenticity can be seen as emerging from the creative blending of multiple influences. This perspective is supported by work from Ray (2016), who argues that culinary authenticity in a globalized world is more about the sincerity and skill of the cook than adherence to rigid traditions.

3.4 Ethical and Social Considerations

Ethical concerns also intersect with discussions of culinary authenticity. Issues such as sustainability, fair trade, and cultural appropriation are increasingly relevant. Wilk (2006) explores how ethical considerations influence perceptions of authenticity, with consumers often valuing foods that are produced and sourced ethically.

Cultural appropriation is another contentious issue, as it involves the borrowing and commercialization of culinary practices by those outside the originating culture. Zlotnick (2014) argues that this can dilute the authenticity of traditional cuisines and exploit cultural heritage. However, others suggest that cultural exchange and adaptation are inherent aspects of culinary evolution, making the boundaries of authenticity fluid and contested (Heldke, 2003).

3.5 Contemporary Trends and Future Directions

Contemporary culinary trends continue to shape the discourse on authenticity. The rise of the farm-to-table movement, for instance, emphasizes the use of local and seasonal ingredients as markers of authenticity. Similarly, the growing interest in regional cuisines and heritage foods reflects a desire to connect with culinary traditions in an authentic manner (Trubek, 2008).

Future research on culinary authenticity is likely to further explore these dynamic interactions between tradition and innovation. As food practices continue to evolve in response to global, social, and technological changes, our understanding of what constitutes authentic cuisine will also need to adapt. Researchers will need to consider how new culinary trends and ethical concerns influence perceptions of authenticity and how these perceptions vary across different cultural and social contexts.

The literature on culinary authenticity reveals a complex and evolving concept, influenced by aesthetic, cultural, social, and global factors. From the preservation of traditional methods to the embrace of culinary fusion, authenticity in food is a multifaceted and contested idea. By examining these various dimensions, scholars can gain a deeper understanding of how culinary practices reflect broader cultural and social dynamics, and how notions of authenticity continue to adapt in a rapidly changing world.

4. Research Methodology

The relevance of the feature of authenticity in recipes in the expectations and experiences of a commoner is a question to ponder over. Though many food critics, restaurateurs and chefs opine that culinary authenticity is an equivocal concept that cannot be perceived as a stable quality, the debate about the same is always ongoing on how authenticity of food gives due credit to it. This study explicates on the expert opinions on seeking authenticity, by elaborating on the evolution of ideas on culinary authenticity and associated implications. Those who contribute to the dialogue on the concept are not only theoretical experts but stakeholders who are directly and indirectly allied to it who come up with several reasons as to why authenticity in food is sought, them being based on personal human sentiments, ethical stances, existing paradigms on good food, aesthetic sense etc. These reasons however are not consciously perceived by those who advocate or contest the notion of authenticity in food.

In order to test variables of this research on a pragmatic level too, a survey was conducted among 100 people between ages 18 and 35, with the help of an online questionnaire. It consisted of questions ranging from dietary habits to opinions regarding fusion food. The age group of 18 to 35 years old suits the research on culinary authenticity for various reasons. This age group includes a wide range of dietary preferences, from traditional diets influenced by family and cultural backgrounds to contemporary dietary trends like veganism, vegetarianism, and paleo diets. This diversity helps capture a broad spectrum of views on what constitutes authentic food.

People aged 18 to 35 have grown up or come of age in an era of globalization, where exposure to different cultures and their cuisines is more prevalent. This makes them more likely to have encountered fusion foods and to have opinions on how these relate to concepts of authenticity. This demographic is generally more tech-savvy and comfortable with online platforms, making them more likely to participate in an online survey. Their familiarity with technology also means they have greater access to information about food trends and culinary innovations from around the world. Younger adults often play a significant role in setting trends, including in the culinary world. Their opinions can be influential in shaping broader societal attitudes toward food and authenticity.

Individuals in this age group are often more aware and concerned about ethical issues related to food, such as sustainability, fair trade, and cultural appropriation. Their perspectives can provide valuable insights into how these factors influence their views on culinary authenticity. The survey questions, which range from dietary habits to opinions on fusion food, are well-suited to capturing the nuanced views of this age group. This demographic is likely to have varying experiences with different types of cuisine, making their input relevant and insightful.

The selected age group represents a significant portion of the population that is active in dining out, experimenting with new foods, and engaging with culinary media. This makes their opinions highly relevant for understanding current trends and attitudes toward food authenticity. Young adults are often highly engaged with food culture, both in terms of consumption and discussion. Their active participation in social media platforms related to food (like Instagram and TikTok) provides a rich source of contemporary viewpoints on what is considered authentic or inauthentic. One primary question was if one would prefer eating foreign native food or seek Indian food in a foreign country for which 64% of the respondents were ready to explore foreign food while 36% preferred Indian. It lays the premise that globalization has facilitated people with food from various parts of the world that they are gradually shedding inhibitions about trying different cuisines if need be.

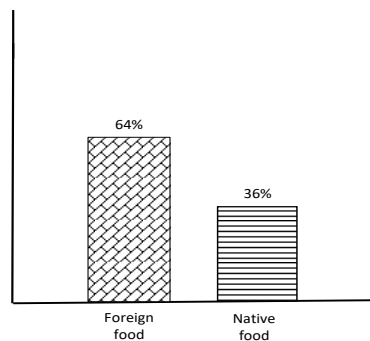


Figure 1. Respondents' choice of food in foreign land

Additionally, individuals in this age group have reached a level of cognitive development where they can articulate their views clearly and reflect on their experiences. This maturity allows for more thoughtful responses to survey questions. The attitudes and preferences of 18 to 35-year-olds are likely to influence future culinary trends. Understanding their views on authenticity can provide foresight into how these concepts might evolve. By focusing on the 18 to 35 age group, the research taps into a demographic that is diverse, influential, and highly engaged with food culture. Their perspectives can provide a comprehensive understanding of the various reasons why authenticity in food is sought and contested, making the survey both relevant and insightful for this research.

Apart from the survey method, including various angles of expert analysis on culinary authenticity is essential for a comprehensive understanding of the topic. Aesthetic reasons for seeking culinary authenticity are crucial because they highlight the deeper, often philosophical motivations behind why individuals might value traditional dishes. This perspective delves into the cultural and emotional significance of food, suggesting that the aesthetic appreciation of food is intertwined with its perceived authenticity.

The subjective perspective of familiarity, rooted in the taste of the dish, further underscores the emotional and sensory connections people have with food. This angle explores how personal and communal memories influence perceptions of what is authentic, revealing the powerful role that taste and tradition play in culinary experiences. A diasporic perspective brings another important dimension by questioning the stability and meaning of culinary authenticity within immigrant communities. This view sheds light on how authenticity is negotiated and maintained in new cultural contexts, illustrating the dynamic nature of food traditions. It also highlights the importance of food in maintaining cultural identity among diasporic populations, thereby adding depth to the discussion of authenticity.

Globalization has significantly influenced culinary practices and preferences, making it crucial to examine how the blending of cultures affects perceptions of authenticity. The preference for variety, and the embrace of foreign cuisines, indicate a shift in how authenticity is perceived and valued. By analyzing how globalization and cultural exchange impact

food practices, the research can address the evolving nature of culinary authenticity in a globalized world. The quest for adventure in food, including the acceptance of different cuisines and variations of native dishes, challenges traditional notions of authenticity. This aspect of the analysis explores how contemporary food preferences and trends disrupt conventional ideas about what is considered authentic, reflecting broader social changes and increasing cultural openness.

Incorporating these approaches of analysis ensures that the research on culinary authenticity is well-rounded and nuanced. It acknowledges the complexity of the concept and recognizes that authenticity in food is influenced by aesthetic, emotional, cultural, and global factors. This comprehensive approach allows for a more thorough exploration of why people seek culinary authenticity and how these motivations are evolving in a rapidly changing world.

5. Aesthetics and Authenticity

Aesthetic reasons to seek culinary authenticity take the forefront at a dialogue since it has a serious conjectural manifestation. Cultural connections that one has to a cuisine cajoles the aesthetic intrigue in approaching food from that cuisine. For instance, if one is used to having *aloo samosas* from a roadside shop near his or her home since childhood, that nostalgic yearning always remains even if he or she migrates from home. Upon seeing a restaurant replicating the same kind of samosas but making it more fancy at the cost of authenticity with the addition of some ingredients one isn't used to eating as a child, it might not justify the sensory nostalgia triggered in that person.

Nicola Perullo, Philosopher and Professor of Aesthetics at the University of Gastronomic Sciences, Italy, in his pivotal work on aesthetics of taste, says:

..what does it mean to say that taste is properly understood through experience, or rather that taste is an aesthetic relationship? (..) Understanding taste is a matter of learning to observe: to observe others but also oneself, because taste concerns everyone. Taste is not just a sense, nor is it only an emotion or opinion. Above all, taste is not a thing. Taste needs to be tried and tasted. (2016, p. 20)

A food item belonging to a particular category is expected to look, smell, taste and feel a particular way, which is also a reason why culinary authenticity is coveted by those who know the food item. "Even general categorizations of works, as paintings or as dance works for example, make essential reference to shared understandings as to how the result of the artist's activity is to articulate its content" (Gaut & Lopes, 2013, 228).

It is argued that knowledge of the category that a piece of art belongs to, is in pursuit for aesthetic of that piece of art. Kendall Walton, an American philosopher, in his *Categories of Art* uses music to explain this concept, citing how sonata form of music has a suspenseful quality which might not be comprehended or realized by a listener if he or she is unaware of the fact that the music belongs to that particular form. (1970, p. 337)

Employing this concept to food, one could take the example of *paper roast dosa*, a South Indian breakfast specialty. A *paper roast dosa* is a crispy crepe made of a rice and lentil batter. By default, it is understood that it is crispy, drenched in either ghee or butter. If the *dosa* is thick and soggy, people would not take it for *paper roast*. On the other hand, it would make a good *uttapam/kal dosai*, another South Indian *dosa* variety which is supposed to have a thickness and texture like that of a pancake.



(*thehindu*. 2022)



(*pinterest*. 2017)

One might have been exposed to a particular category which helps in appreciating the aesthetic attributes. For instance, there is a dish called *Pesarattu*, a *dosa* specialty of southern states, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. It is a crepe made of

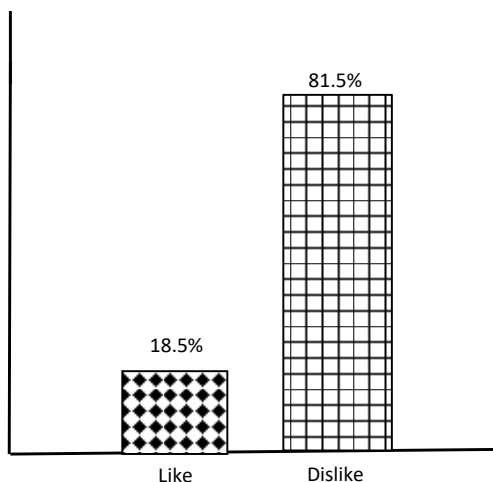
green gram batter, which is usually accompanied by a ginger chutney that is tangy and sweet in taste. One might be unaware of the fact that this is a traditional food combination that has been passed down through generations. In such a scenario, the unfamiliar sweetness of the chutney in relation to most chutneys, might not have an intended effect upon his or her palate. One needs some familiarity with the category of *Dosas* to experience the aesthetic impact of such a dish as aforementioned. The dish’s unique aesthetic characteristics are foregrounded when a familiar flavour profile is coupled with a pleasing presentation, smell, texture and proportion in ingredients.

Regina Bendix, an expert in Ethnology, opines thus in her work *In Search of Authenticity*: “behind the assiduous documentation and defense of the authentic, lies an unarticulated anxiety of losing the subject” (1997, p. 10). Nevertheless, there could be an additional aesthetic quality springing from inauthenticity as well, in the ways in which the dish fascinatingly breaks away with cultural heritage. For instance, the well-known Italian dish Pizza originated roughly during the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century as part of the several flatbread dishes that came into being. But a very famous version of pizza is the Chicago pot pie pizza which is hollow like that of a pie with the generic toppings becoming filling of the pie – like structure of the pizza. Although this is a clear deviation from the tradition, it is welcome by people who travel from several parts of the world to Chicago. The authenticity of the pot pie pizza is hardly ever questioned by any Food Critic or Chef because taste, flavour and ubiquity of the food item eclipses question of its heritage.



(pinterest, 2017)

Inauthenticity of experimental food is another aspect of food pop culture that is welcome for at least a brief period of time, based on the extent of sensation a particular dish creates. A recent Instagram post of ndtv shows the creation of the recent experimental dish, *Masala dosa ice cream*. Picture of the dish was attached as part of a question of the survey, asking if the respondents like the idea of it. While 18.5% supported it, 81.5% did not. The dish cannot be categorized under sweet or savory, which could be a probable reason why it did not appeal to many. However, 18.5% do like the idea of it, which shows marginal inclination in the mindsets of people towards experimentation in food.



(NDTVfood, 2022)

Figure 2. Respondents’ view on ‘Masala Dosa Ice cream’

Those who are aware of the background culture and corresponding ingredients of a dish, would be concerned about the

aesthetic quality of that dish. A major ingredient of the dish could be a specific variant of the commonly known ingredient. When another variant of that ingredient is used, it might not necessarily impact the output of the dish. But the knowledge that the ingredient added is not the right variant could unconsciously influence the one who tastes the dish and comments on it.

For instance, in the *Chettinad* cuisine, which is one that originated from parts of Tamil Nadu, country chicken has been traditionally used since years. But now a days, the procedure and ingredients remain the same except for the fact that broiler chicken is used in place of country chicken. Those who are aware of this tradition, would say the dish is not authentic for aesthetic reasons while someone who is unaware of the same need not necessarily see the change of meat as inauthentic.

Matthew Strohl, an expert in Aesthetics and Philosophy, states thus: “the special aesthetic properties of modernist food sometimes depend on inauthenticity. There are many contexts where we are clearly justified in not giving even *pro tanto* weight to considerations of culinary authenticity” (2019, p. 5).

6. Subjective, Cultural and Pedagogical Expositions

A prominent exposition of seeking authenticity is the subjective perspective of familiarity to food as discussed under aesthetic reasoning, wherein familiarity is rooted in the taste of the dish.

Another reason is the pedagogical value that culinary authenticity carries. For instance, a student of Cultural Studies would take an interest in trying to reproduce recipes authentically that he or she comes across in the curriculum. It would help in giving them a better understanding of the patterns of people’s daily lives and their cultural roots. A student of Tourism or Catering would also prefer to taste authentic varieties of popular dishes that they aren’t otherwise exposed to. If one is to travel to Japan to taste authentic Sushi dishes, he or she would prefer raw meat in the sushi roll rather than cooked sausage meat often used in some Indian versions of Sushi to suit the Indian palate.

The cultural exposition relies on the fact that many food items, their preparatory methods, the constituents, and origin have cultural implications, due to which the authenticity of these dishes are regarded significant. Traditional dishes made during Indian festive occasions, such as Bengali *Sondesh* prepared during festivals like Durga Puja, or *Ada pradhaman* of Kerala which is a delicacy prepared especially during the festival Onam, exemplify this exposition. Such dishes are prepared during festivals, in specific ways in strict accordance with traditional recipes.

Home food not only provides intimations of security in that it represents a culturally determined basic need for nutrition, it also provides clear intimation of familiarity in that one knows what to do with it, how to cook it, how to present it and how to eat it, thus promoting a multitude of homely practices (unlike facing the unknowable: eg, Salman Rushdie’s description of the Indian migrant facing the English kipper in *The Satanic Verses*). (Hage, 1997, p. 8)

Social reasons for valuing culinary authenticity are based on the premise that anybody whose friendships flourish over food and dining, would want to introduce their native food to their friends. Nostalgia and fond memories that both parties have with food are achieved with closest approximation to it as possible.

7. Diasporic Authenticity – An Enigma?

A diasporic perspective puts the phenomenon of culinary authenticity to question, although some social and cultural reasons do account for the association between the immigrant experience and culinary authenticity. Young Oum in his work *Authenticity and Representation* states thus:

“Food and cuisine are important tools and signifiers in nationalist discourses as well as immigrant literature. (...) it variously is an object of nostalgia, longing, and desire; or a symbol of national identity and spirit; or a source of conflict, alienation, and embarrassment.” (2005, p. 109)

Emotional ties with a certain kind of food and a certain method of preparation of that food might induce in a diasporic experience, the need for what is superficially often called authenticity. A food item is not merely constituent of some native ingredients, but is also associated with family, tradition, comfort, solace and familiarity. Human experiences are often enriched by the notion of familiarity or wonder. Since food is an everyday affair, getting wonderstruck through that means, is often a neglected choice, especially for an immigrant who would naturally be inclined towards familiarity.

However, adapting to a new culture is defined by an important factor that is, adapting to the food habits. Experts in philosophy of food, Lisa Heldke and Jens Thomsen, in their seminal work *Two Concepts of Authenticity*, speak of how any immigrant individual showing interest in culinary authenticity could be a means of social signalling (2014, p. 85). It means that an immigrant individual in a new space, attempts to show that he or she can differentiate worldliness or multicultural culinary patterns and cultural sophistication. It is also used as a means of expressing how one is well-aware of culinary climates in different ethnicities, thereby achieving a social mileage in the new immigrant atmosphere.

Such approaches pave way to the universality of culinary authenticity. Subjectivity seems to play a phenomenal part in

defining the parameters of authenticity in food, especially when diasporic experiences are concerned. An Indian immigrant in the U.S might find authenticity in a *Dal Makhani*, which constitutes lentils, onions and tomatoes in it, while a well-established restaurateur or a food critic residing in Punjab might question its authenticity, since he knows that the original *Dal Makhani* was made of black dal and didn't contain onions or tomatoes. Even among Indian immigrants, a common ground on a dish's authenticity may not be established since each immigrant would have a different experience with the dish and its variations since childhood.

According to Anthropologist Sidney Mintz, there is nothing called an integral national cuisine since cooking and eating styles cannot be distinguished through politically determined borderlines (Oum, 2005, p. 111). A typical example suiting this idea would be of the infamous dish *Chicken Tikka Masala* in Britain. A dish that is said to have originated in India, made by a Bangladeshi Chef, travelled to the United Kingdom and spread vast and wide into the menus of popular restaurants that it emerged as Britain's National Dish, as declared by the then Foreign Secretary Robert Cook in the year 2001.

Observations made by Anita Mannur in her *Culinary Fictions* speak about such food politics of the time. When the abovementioned declaration was made, conformists among the audience and food critics disparaged the dish to be an inauthentic mimicry that had no precursors in the Indian cuisine. Certain other people had a disagreement with the establishment of the dish in the U.K because certain complicated political and historical conditions led to the dish being an infamous contribution to the British cuisine, which they opined, need not necessarily carry any credit to the flavour or profoundness of the dish itself (2013, p. 4).

Although the origins of the dish are debated for its obscurity, the journey of the dish took across borders is intriguing. The ingredients and procedures used in the dish have also been adopted for many other dishes, as cultural cuisines kept evolving with globalization and trade.

"For Robin Cook, chicken tikka masala represents a new form of multiculturalism, notably one in which the British national character is praised for its ability and willingness to 'absorb' from and adapt the culinary histories of its immigrants and formerly colonized subjects" (Mannur, 2013, p. 5). This fact about chicken tikka masala being the national dish of Britain was posted as a question of the survey, asking for the respondents' reactions to it. While 61% opined that they find it strange, 39% did not find it strange. Since the margin of difference between the two are not that big, it ratifies the fact that people have begun understanding the journey that a dish might take, in the scenario of globalization.

8. Restaurant Authenticity in a Globalized Market

With the advent of globalization, cultures have collaborated on a massive scale that people have become highly tolerable of what is foreign. Variety is preferred in many aspects of lifestyle and food is not an exception. People look for adventure in food, not merely denoting fusion food but by accepting different cuisines and variations to one's native cuisine as well, thereby putting to question the notion of authenticity.

In the survey carried out, respondents had to choose their favourite kind of food, broadly categorising it into their native traditional food, street food, healthy food and fusion food. It was surprising that an equal percentage of 22.8% preferred both fusion food and traditional food. Highest percentage of 36% voted for street food and 18.4% preferred healthy food. Thus is the disposition of current generation youngsters wherein a good percentage of them see the activity of eating as an experience and are open to experimentation on their food habits, irrespective of its authenticity.

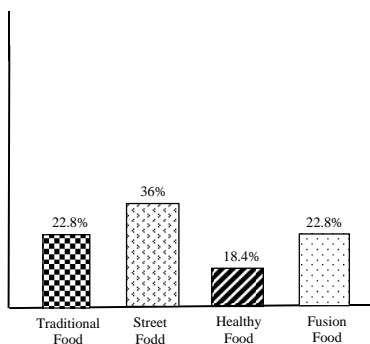


Figure 3. Respondents' preference on food kind

According to a Survey conducted by the National Restaurants Association of India in 2019 on restaurant food preferred by Indians that year, a whopping 63% Indians ordered food of North Indian Cuisine and Mughlai food (food evolved from culinary style of Medieval India), reports Times of India. 27% ordered Chinese and 23% ordered South India food.

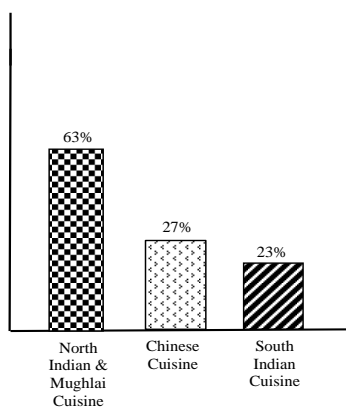


Figure 4. Graph based on National Restaurants Association of India 2019 Survey Report

Chinese food, as it is known across the globe mostly comprises of fried meat often wetted in sweet and sour sauces. If the meal is topped off with a fortune cookie, it is considered as a typical American Chinese alliance of food. It could be seen as disputable, but most locals are fond of this kind of Chinese food with alterations suiting their taste buds. It is not a surprising fact that restaurants which serve that food are owned by Chinese. Even so, food critics do contend if the alterations made discard the truth of what they call ‘authentic’ dish of the respective cuisines.

Another such example would be of sushi which is so popularised nowadays around the world, in their different versions suiting the tastes of the countries they are sold in. In many places in the West and in the east (including India), Japanese Sushi is inside out. Traditionally, in Japan, the meat is on top of the rice whereas it is wrapped inside rolled sticky rice in India. As said by Chef Hiroko Shimbo, author of *The Sushi Experience*, this design was first adapted in the U.S to resemble the California rolls. Due to familiarity in look of the dish, more American customers who wish to try a Japanese dish would prefer this dish. (Kulkarni, 2019)

In the survey conducted, questions that check the respondents’ knowledge of sushi were asked. Although 62% of the respondents had heard of a dish called ‘sushi,’ on enquiring if they can choose among different variants of a sushi, there were misapprehensions. The highest percentage of 41% had voted for *kimbap*, a Tibetan variation of the authentic Japanese sushi. The next highest percentage recorded was 28% for the American variant of Sushi, the California roll. 26% chose *sashimi* and a least 5% chose *maki*. This response validates the fact that preferring a food item for its authenticity is not a predominant trait amidst consumers. Flavour and familiarity seem to be the discerning factors in choosing a dish.

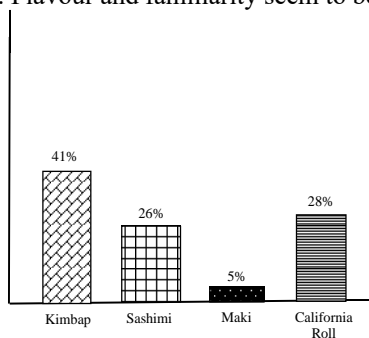


Figure 5. Respondents’ choice of authentic Sushi

Maria Athanasopoulou, Chairwoman of the World Food Travel Association says thus in one of her blogs:

The Greek moussaka that we all know and love today was created by a famous Greek chef in 1910. To make the dish his own, he removed many spices from the recipe and added French béchamel on top. There is no Greek who does not know moussaka. So is this dish an authentic Greek recipe according to the definitions of gastronomic tourism? This is difficult to answer. (2020)

The fast-food industry too plays a major role in this alteration of cuisines to suit the globalised scenario where the restaurateurs need to cater to the local crowd and the diasporic immigrants as well. It is one that is constantly evolving in its menu. Renowned fast-food chains have their branches in different locations, but what they offer to their customers differ from place to place. The concept of ‘rice bowl’ that the very famous *KFC* offers is not a dish that’s served in their branches in the Western countries, whereas it is a dish that is in demand in countries like India where rice is the staple food.

According to Qi, an expert specialising in Corporate social responsibility, core menu items of joints like *KFC* are

preserved, but certain items are rolled out to match the palate of local consumers. They also speak of another fitting example of the joint *Subway* whose sandwiches are known for customisations that can be done by the customers themselves. The different available ingredients differ from country to country. While countries like India and Mexico might have similar flavour combinations for the customers to choose from, places like the U.S or Canada might have flavour combinations that cater to the less spicy native palates.

It is evident how brands around the world have been augmenting their menu to cater to a much larger scale of customers, ranging from natives to immigrants; novice foodies to acclaimed critics etc, striving to keep the balance between authenticity and customer gratification.

There are many successful individual restaurateurs who begin from scratch to serve native food in an immigrant country. One such restaurateur is Chinchakriya Un who is originally from Cambodia. She was born in a refugee camp in Thailand and moved to the U.S when she was an infant. Her culinary lessons were from her mother in the most nonchalant way a daughter could ever learn from any mother. She hosts several food-based events in the U.S today.

Most of her dishes comprise of a base ingredient called *kreung* which is considered a native Cambodian ingredient. *Kreung* is a combination of several herbs and spices such as galanga, lemongrass, ginger etc. Un has named her culinary projects in the U.S after the ingredient *kreung*. Events hosted under that project are considered an influential platform to commemorate Cambodian food and culture. It provides a space for conversation within the Cambodian diaspora in the U.S, sharing their thoughts on native food and culture.

Lily Cho opines thus about a diasporic restaurant, in a chapter she contributed to the work, *American Chinese Restaurants: Society, Culture and Consumption*:

A mixture of elaborate paper lantern-style lights and bright fluorescent tubes illuminates the space. There is a glass jar filled with fortune-cookie fortunes. Everything feels a bit too familiar, right but not quite right. You are not sure if you should sit down. Welcome to one of Karen Tam's Gold Mountain Restaurants...They are recognizable as a particular kind of restaurant. They are not just Chinese restaurants, but a specific genre of Chinese restaurant characterized precisely by their lack of cosmopolitanism. (2020, p. 276)

The thirst to make authenticity meet customer gratification is innate in most immigrant restaurateurs. Rohini Dey, the owner of 'Vermillion,' an Indian Latin restaurant first established in Chicago and later in New York, says how the drive to step into restaurant business was the market that Indian cuisine had amongst people of the U.S. and the void for original Indian food.

Ishani Duttagupta spoke for *Economic Times* on what encouraged Dey into business thus:

...she was looking at what she felt was an unmet market niche. It was the mediocrity that passed off as Indian cuisine abroad that spurred her into action: the \$8.99 all-you-can-eat buffets; the predictable, mushy, overcooked fare, swimming in oil and nuclear food dyes; and the clunky table settings amid faded visuals of camels and the Taj Mahal convinced her about the appetite for honest and genuine fare with a desi twist. (2016)

What is borrowed today need not necessarily still be called borrowed tomorrow. It could become an integral part of a cuisine based on how it is being transacted and adopted to suit the taste, needs and market. Regional specialties are the products of cooking traditions brought over by immigrant settlers, combined with the indigenous ingredients.

For many years, critics often argued that most menus offered the same monotonous, mediocre food. Recently, in contrast, cooking has become fashionable, and many local dishes are considered classical. The fact is, however, in any country one finds both good and bad food. It takes a skilled cook with a knowledge of the basics to prepare exceptional food, whether it is American, classical French, Chinese, Indian or any other. Shoko Imai, an expert in Food Studies says thus:

The notion of place-based authenticity has inevitably been problematized in an era in which globalization is driven by the networking activities of a dispersed collection of actors, or agents. Today, in the globalized world of haute cuisine, culinary authenticity is established and sustained more in terms of agent-based authenticity than place-based authenticity. (2015, p. 64)

Evidently, food-in-exile, or diaspora food, is often constrained by the need to remain true to its origins. Diasporic food could be classified under popular culture, which makes it difficult to thrive and like every other popular culture, it needs to fight its way through the masses, proving its profundity and novelty.

9. Conclusion

In the ever-globalizing world, it has become increasingly evident how cuisines are resonant of the communities itself and propagate quintessential links between food and identity. Immigrant life, however, is besieged with the binaries of east-west, past-present, right-wrong and by extension, original-unoriginal or authentic-unauthentic that are all put to question or sometimes resolved by food.

From the work *Two Concepts of Authenticity*, Heldke's and Thomsen's view on the notion of culinary authenticity seems fit in the current climate:

Cuisines are not Platonic forms; they are loose collections of culinary projects, all porous, malleable, permeable and changeable to varying degrees. Relatedly, to valorize the pursuit of replicability is to encourage rigidity, inappropriate (even bizarre) standards of "purity," and an essentializing of ethnic Others. It freezes cultures in amber, as it were, demanding adherence to a standard that is impossible in practice and in principle both. (2014, p. 84)

The temporality of aspects like ingredients, techniques, methods and utensils used in a particular cuisine for a particular dish has to be acknowledged when one investigates culinary authenticity which is innately fluid and turbulent in an evolving social environment, with respect to migration and trade.

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