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Topic of Research: Food, Feelings and Flavours: A Study of Contemporary Indian Writing in English on Food

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FINDINGS

This PhD thesis has three important findings. Firstly, the thesis finds an important research pathway in food culture studies where instead of studying food vis-à-vis theories of the representational, a focus on the relational modalities that food and taste precipitate is foregrounded. Secondly, the study finds that a close reading of contemporary and non-traditional genres of food writing such as restaurant narratives, contemporary cookbooks and food blogs speaks more urgently to our global realities. The third finding is that pre-existent categories of heritage, authenticity, and locality are insufficient to address our planetary reality.

Thus, the first chapter initiates a discussion on taste and eating. The finding of my first chapter is that taste has diverse relational modalities as it engenders feelings of satisfaction, belonging, freshness, lightness, pleasure etc. I find that food, tasting and eating are orienting processes that produce effects of proximity and distance often facilitating sensory shifts.

In the second chapter of my thesis, the gastro-narratives that I study show how restaurant food scenes create emotional worlds. In my finding, food is a story of lived relationality. I show that at stake in eating out experiences is not distinction, but instead world making, not representational values but instead relational modalities such as satisfaction and belonging. In my finding, eating out is a situated, affectively charged experience which often facilitates post-ethnic belonging.

The finding of my third chapter is that contemporary cookbooks are increasingly adopting more universal and affectively resonant themes. Contemporary Cookbooks foreground emotions which cut across cultural boundaries as is the case with Tarana Husain Khan's *Degh to Datarkhwan*. On the surface, Khan lists recipes from a specialised and heritage Rampuri cuisine yet fundamentally the stories and anecdotes she recounts enumerate universal emotions that eating evokes blurring the fine line between local and global. I show how contemporary cookbooks highlight eating as a deeply affective experience that transcends borders, identities and geographies to speak to a shared human sensibility.

The finding of my fourth chapter is that healthy eating in today's time is a deterritorialized practice that prioritizes affect over tradition which is why emotional responses to food such as

the pleasure of freshness or the feeling of lightness become central to how people relate to food. My study of food blogs leads to the finding that food cooked at home today is not quite thought of in terms of its cultural viability, seldom conceived as an anchor of one's identity and roots. In this kind of world-making, fixed ideas of gastro-nostalgia or authenticity are destabilized, and instead, emotional responses to food like the pleasure of freshness or the feeling of lightness become central to how people relate to food.

The findings of this study demonstrate that representations of food and eating across food blogs, contemporary cookbooks, and gastro-narratives position eating as more than an act of consumption, cultural tradition, or identity formation. Instead, eating emerges as a dynamic and affective mode of relating to the world. The analysis reveals that sensory experiences such as the appeal of freshness, the pursuit of balance, and the desire for satisfaction significantly shape practices of dwelling, attachment, and everyday engagement. These narratives show that food mediates relationships between individuals and their environments through embodied and affective encounters. Consequently, the study finds that eating functions as a process of worlding, one that unsettles fixed notions of heritage and diversity and encourages the transcendence of predetermined categories through lived, sensory experience.