



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Malabar Culinary Culture: Cultural appreciation of Arab flavor

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Abstract

In this article, we discuss how migration and cultural diffusion between the two shores of the Arabian Sea, the Malabar Coast and the Arab world revolutionized the Malabar culinary culture. Migration as always, is significant because immigrants bring with them skills, ideas, new perspectives and many other attributes, all of which are inspiring innovations. Among all their contributions, what often gets chipped away is, the rich culinary culture they have bequeathed to society. Here, in this paper, we delve into one such story of migration and cultural appreciation, with Malabar culinary culture as the main focus. Malabar culinary culture rather than emphasizing on certain dishes and appetite, it is now perceived as a ubiquitous aspect linked to various facets of life, bringing to the core the subject of societal structure and wisdom. Whilst cultural appropriation and acculturation act oblivious to the culinary traditions of immigrants and refugees in the rest of the world, the Malabar culinary culture adapted, evolved and preserved both indigenous and immigrant recipes. Therefore, a preliminary attempt is also made to identify the socio-cultural changes accompanied by the appreciation of migrant culture in Malabar.

Keywords

Arab culture, culinary culture, cultural appropriation, majoritarian, Malabar, migration

Introduction

Culinary culture has always been a significant indicator that reflects the kind of history experienced by a region and even plays a greater role in defining who we are. Malabar cuisine, no less has multiple allegories to enumerate about the communities in Malabar, their culture, ethnicity and history. Food is an indispensable part of the lifestyle and culture of the Malabar Coast. The diversity of the Malabar cuisine is the result of numerous interactions with the cultures that traded and settled in Malabar. Though Malabar cuisine also acquired culinary knowledge from the indigenous recipes, the major influence was from Arabs, who stayed over and established their culture along with the religion. Bringing Malabar culinary culture, which has a greater Islamic influence, to the forefront is unconventional to the studies associated with Islam and Malabar, which hitherto focused on political economy, religious laws and traditions. Acknowledging their contributions to culture and society would be a welcome reprieve, especially when India which hosts the third-largest Muslim population in the world, is currently ascribing to majoritarian tendencies.

Sources relied for this research article are travel accounts, historical sources, Indian migration reports and works on how cultural appropriation has impacted migrants and minorities in the contemporary world. In order to understand the Arab influences on Malabar cuisine, a comparative and connected study is made between the recipes followed, especially with the culinary textbooks from two cultures. For this article, interviews and observations are also conducted, through which the multifaceted exchange of material and cultural possessions that take place between the Malabar and the Arab world are explored.

The study of Malabar culinary practices would be meaningless and incomplete without dissecting the geographical, cross-cultural and historical factors associated with Malabar. The region lies between the Arabian Sea in the west and the Western Ghats in the east, therefore it was easier for Malabar Coast to access the Arab world and vice-versa than to access North India since the Western Ghats stand as a bulwark. In the pre-modern times, the entire South Western coast of the Indian subcontinent was termed Malabar and in British India, Malabar was the administrative district of the Madras Presidency (Logan 2010). But currently, Malabar is not any political or administrative unit, but the term is still kept as a reminiscence or a cultural presence (Narayanan 1993). The present-day Malabar includes the northern districts of Kannur, Kozhikode, Wayanad, Malappuram, and some areas of Thrissur and Palakkad districts in the state of Kerala. Although rich food culture exists across northern Kerala, the predominance of Malabar culinary culture is in the districts of Kozhikode and Kannur which were the prominent trading centres of the ancient and medieval period. Though Malappuram is the only district with a Muslim majority in the Malabar region as well as in the state, the culinary culture of Malabar has a greater Muslim dominance (Osella and Osella 2008, p. 171).

Malabar was the spice garden of the ancient and medieval world, for which the traders from distant countries travelled great distances by sea (Turner 2005, p. 30). In those days, spices were highly valued and were also considered sacred by the Arabs and the Europeans. Spices were traded from Malabar Coast to the Mediterranean and from there to the markets of Europe (Prange 2018, p. 32). These spices enriched the European cuisine with subtle aromas and rich flavors (Turner 2005, p. 13). It was the Arabs who benefitted the most from this trade, as it was they who acquired the spices (Prange 2018, see also Mooza Faiza 2012). Some of them settled in different parts of Malabar and established matrimonial relations with natives and also established their religion. Islam reached Malabar in 7th century CE, soon after it was propounded by Prophet Mohammed. Arab merchants from Aden and *Hadhramis* from Hadramaut (located mostly in present-day eastern Yemen) were the early conduits through which Islam reached the Malabar Coast. They were no strangers as their ancestors had been coming to the region for trade since pre-Islamic times (Prange 2018, p. 55, Ilias, 2007: 442). The rulers of the region, the *Zamorins* patronized the new faith and they also gave privileges, and extended facilities to Arabs such as land to build their mosques. Thus a favourable environment was created for the Muslims and their culture to flourish (Menon 2017, p. 96, Dale 1980, p. 13). Marginalized sections of Malabar and people in the lower strata of the caste system especially the untouchables¹ perceived conversion to Islam as an emancipation as it gave them social mobility (Prange 2018). Apart from this, crossing the sea which was considered a taboo in Hindu society was done away with. Therefore, the *Zamorins* acquired a community engaged in sea trade, which gave a fillip to their commercial interests and established naval prowess. The earliest Arab communities who settled in Malabar were known as *Mappilas*, therefore the Malabar cuisine is also known by the name *Mappila* cuisine. The name *Mappilas* originated from the word '*mahapilla*', meaning someone of high position or a respected one. Later the term was also used to denote the Muslim bridegroom and the local converts (Joseph 2017, Prange 2018). Malabar Muslims follow the Shafi sect of Sunni Islam, which is one of the many factors that distinguish the latter from those of the same faith in other parts of the country.

The location of Malabar, is an overriding factor for the region's rich culinary history. The area served as a channel that connected the trade routes of various empires. It was in Malabar, the Portuguese explorer Vasco de Gama, who became the first European to reach India via the Atlantic Ocean arrived (Curtis and Hansen 2015, p. 351). Malabar hosted all the migrants and their culture without any demur, adapting and evolving itself in the process, Malabar culinary culture underwent a paradigm shift, incorporating diverse cuisines and cultures of the world. The Gulf boom that resulted in the mass emigration of the Kerala population particularly of Malabar, to the Arab countries in the last decades of the 20th century also decisively shaped the Malabar cuisine. A vast population of Malabar is in Gulf countries and they are more acquainted with the Arab culture than the cultures of other Indian states. Since *Mappilas* had a lot in common with the Arab culture, when they migrated they found it easier to adapt. Like the *Zamorins*, who treated the Arabs with dignity and ensured a social environment for the latter during their visit to Malabar, people from Malabar to Arab countries, following the Gulf boom were also welcomed in warmth, such that the migration still continues except with more fervour. Though the migration to the Gulf is of short term nature, the Gulf returnees imbibed the socio-cultural elements of Arabs and incorporated it to the native culture. This commercial and cultural interaction later culminated in the formation of a sophisticated culinary culture.

The Malabar dining

With years of cultural diffusion, Malabar dining space has accommodated a cauldron of recipes and flavors to satiate every palate. The cuisine became enriched with flavoursome and healthy dishes such as nuts, dates, raisins, ghee and abundant use of meat. One major example of this cultural diffusion can be seen in the preparation of *Pathiri* (a bread made of rice flour), as Arabs are fond of bread while Keralites (natives of Kerala) have a strong craving for rice, so the dish *Pathiri* (Helou 2018, p. 16, Kannampilly 2003, p. 148). *Pathiri* and *Roti* of different types is a must in the region whether for dipping, scooping and filling. Arab influence can also be seen in terms of certain techniques used for the preparation of meals. For example, ghee is used abundantly in Malabar food, while the rest of the region in the state rely heavily on coconut oil. The Arabs also use ghee made from the cattle they rear. The Malabar's appetite for stuffed meat also has its origin in the Middle East. Like Arab cuisine has varieties of stuffed food, Malabar cuisine also has recipes of stuffed dishes like *Kozhi thalayana* (a whole chicken stuffed with boiled eggs and then encased in dough and baked), *Arikadukka* (Mussels stuffed with fragrant rice and coconut paste, is marinated in a fiery batter made of red chillies and fried to perfection) and *Pazham Nirachathu* (Banana stuffed with grated coconuts, nuts and then fried in ghee) to name a few (Mooza 2012, Sathyendran 2015).

Kerala's adherence to rice, add to the table a chunk of scrumptious rice dishes. *Biryani*, a dish made with melange of spices, rice, meat, and egg is the highly sought-after dish of Malabar cuisine. The dish is believed to be of Persian origin and it was a prominent dish in the Mughal imperial kitchen (Singh and Mathur 2016). But the Malabar Biryani is influenced by the Middle Eastern recipe where *dum* cooking is adopted for acquiring tenderness for meat, unlike the Persian technique of marinating the meat in yoghurt (Mooza 2012, p. 9). *Dum* is a method in which heat is applied both to the top and bottom of the cooking vessel. *Biryani* in different places of Malabar has distinct taste and flavor as they all employ different recipes. *Neychoru* (In Malayalam, the language spoken by the people of Kerala, 'ney' means ghee) is another rice dish, where the latter is fried lightly in ghee with onions, cloves, cinnamon and cardamom and finally boiled to a finish (Kannampilly 2003). Festive occasions without the presence of *Neychoru* or *Biryani* is inconceivable. *Mandi*, a distant cousin of *Biryani* is another major rice variety. Though the recipe is not the exact replica of the quintessential Arabic food, the taste is fairly close and it has even replaced the traditional *Malabar Biryani* in many weddings and festive occasions. Another major rice variety listed recently in the Malabar menu is *Machboos* also known as *Kabsa* which is the national delicacy of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Bahrain, brought to Malabar mainly by the Gulf returnees (Helou 2018, p. 453).

It was after the gulf migration, the Malabar cuisine gained momentum and began evolving, introducing new flavors, colors, and recipes from the Arab culinary traditions. Grilled meats such as, *Shawaya* or Rotisserie, *Al-faham*, *Arabic Kebabs*, *Shish taouk et al.* has made a furore in Malabar accompanied by different varieties of *pathiri*. *Shawarma* and its wonderful variations are found abundant, and they are probably the closest thing you could call street food in Malabar (Helou 2018). One can also find Arabic salads like *fattoush*, *tabbouleh*, and an extended variant of *malfoof* salad and sauce varieties like *Salatra Hara*, *Shatta*, *Tahini*, *Toum* (garlic sauce) which are served along with rice and grilled dishes. One important thing, we have to take note here is, while serving these Middle Eastern dishes in restaurants, they are listed separately as Arabic dishes. Malabar, being a coastal area, seafood find ample space in the dining. With fishing nets scattered around the Malabar, you can find amazing prawns, crabs, and an array of fresh fish which form an integral part of Malabar cuisine (Mooza 2012). Though fishes are prepared with local recipes, on festive occasions and in restaurants they are often grilled and barbecued. River and lake fishes are also widely consumed. Curries in Malabar are not as spicy as Indian type curry, but with a mild and delicate flavor, accompanied by *Pathiri* or *Roti*. Chicken, lamb, beef, fish, and shrimp, all are used for the preparation of curry. During family gatherings and festive occasions like Eid al-Fitr (the feast of breaking the fast, which marks the end of Ramadan) and Eid al-Adha (the feast of the sacrifice), a whole animal especially lamb or goat is butchered and a section of meat is distributed to the people in the vicinity, relatives and those less fortunate. Different methods are used for cooking this whole meat, but usually it is roasted or grilled. This is largely similar to what Arab Bedouins does during festive occasions where a whole baby camel is prepared for meal (Helou 2018, p. 197).

Another major Arab influence can be seen in the dish *Alisa*, a porridge made of wheat, meat and cinnamon, which is similar to *Harisa*, a recipe preserved over centuries by the people of the Middle East (Kannampilly 2003, Helou 2018). The recipe has its roots in Arab culture and was in vogue even during the time of Prophet. In medieval Baghdad, it was called '*hareesi*'. Recipes for this dish are found in 10th century Levantine

cookbooks like “Annals of the Caliph’s Kitchen”, and “Delights from the Garden of Eden”. Even today, the dish is served in Turkey, where it is known by the name *herise*, and in Lebanon, it is called *hreessey* (Nasrallah N 2019). In Malabar, Alissa is usually prepared and enjoyed during the month of Ramadan. Date figures prominently in the regular diet of Malabar and it is the first food people eat when they break the long day’s fast during the month of Ramadan. Dates are mainly imported from Arab countries to Malabar and the Gulf migrants on their way back to Malabar bring these savoury with them, which is then gifted to the vicinities. Arab influence can also be seen in desert dishes and stewed fruits which is found abundant in the local markets. *Halwa* is one of the most famous and sought-after delicacies of Malabar (Mooza 2012, p. 6). It was gifted to Zamorin by Arabs, when they came here for trade, which later became an integral part of Malabar cuisine. There are myriad varieties of *Halwa* that are available across Malabar. The main ingredients include flour, eggs, sugar or jaggery and nuts. The name *Halwa* has its root in the Arab word ‘*hulw*’ meaning sweet. Jackfruit, a very common and popular fruit found in the yard of almost every house throughout Kerala, introduced by the Portuguese is now consumed as deep-fried snacks and also used in the preparation of *Halwa*. Malabar cuisine has a wide range of snack varieties which are similar to or variants of Arabic dishes such as *Falafel*, *samosa*, Erachi pathiri (a fried bread stuffed with meat), *Chatti Pathiri* (a layered pastry that can be made in both sweet and savoury form, the dish is similar to the *Italian lasagna*, but instead of pasta, pastry sheets or pancakes made with flour, egg, oil and water are used), *Unakkaya* (boiled ripe banana paste covering a mixture of cashew nuts, raisins and sugar is deep fried) to name a few (Sathyendran 2015). Malabar cuisine relies heavily on spices which was a major item of trade during ancient and medieval times. The different kinds of spices used in Malabar cuisine are shallots, cinnamon, cardamom, ginger, cloves, garlic, coriander, pepper, cumin, and many others.

Like the Arab world, people in Malabar also prefer to have coffee or tea after heavy meals. They are heavily spiced with cardamom, cloves, and cinnamon. Another highly sought-after drink in the Malabar region is *Sulaimani*, a digestive drink especially after having Biryani. A spiced black tea stirred to a golden color with spices like cinnamon, cardamom, cloves, ginger, and finally a dash of lemon is added too. ‘Sulaiman’ in Arabic translates to ‘man of peace’. The name was given to this tea by the locals in the Malabar because of the cordial relation they had with the Arabs and would probably be in reminiscence of the Arab merchant Sulaiman or the trading community Sulaymani Bohras (J S 2020, Nair SU 2015). The secret behind its high demand and scrumptious flavor, people of Malabar says, is a sprinkling of love and affection along with the recipe.

With its affinity for non-veg food, Malabar has the trend of inventing the non-veg counterpart of popular vegetarian dishes (Abraham 2019, p. 30). If you are a meat eater and like a little spice, Malabar cuisine is the Mecca of it all. This hankering for meat dishes is often witnessed across Kerala, which probably be taken influence from the Malabar culinary culture. While the slaughter of cow for beef consumption is banned across India, as the cow is considered sacred by right-wing Hindu nationalists, Kerala and few other north-eastern states stand strenuously opposed to it (Osella and Osella 2008, p. 170). In Kerala, beef is widely consumed by all cutting across caste, class and religion. *Porotta* (a bread made of refined and processed wheat flour) along with beef is the most popular dish in Kerala (Kannampilly 2003). The lascivious feeling for this combination is not confined to Malabar but across the state. While Muslims restrict from eating pork which they considered haram (Jump 2002, p. 139), and few Hindu households restrain from consuming meat, Christians in Kerala do not have any dietary restrictions. People of Malabar across religion, unlike the rest of Kerala, does not confine from consuming meat during festive occasions of Hindu traditions. On state festivals such as Vishu and Onam, whilst the rest of Kerala adhere to a vegetarian feast popularly called *Sadya*, people in Malabar, prefer to eat non-veg dishes along with *Sadya* (Kannampilly 2003). This is a significant development because in the caste system, people who eat meat were considered untouchables and polluting, but having the same now, even in occasions that are considered the commemoration of traditions, unlike elsewhere in the state is unique to Malabar.

Malabar culinary culture also got recognised in Malayalam films. One such film was *Ustad Hotel*, a touching tale set in Kozhikode, depicts the story of a grandfather and grandson, who bond over their shared love for food and cooking (Mythily 2020). Food being cooked and served with a heart full of love and humility, and portraying the beauty of the place, the movie opulently fills our heart with all the goodness of Malabar. Following the trend and finding food as a recipe for success, many films came up in Mollywood (Malayalam

film industry) portraying great shots of food and local cuisines. Food-related YouTube channels and culinary shows exploring Malabar cuisine also become vogue in Kerala.

Rendering egalitarianism

The area of culinary studies has a quintessential role in recent times because rather than emphasizing on certain dishes and appetite, it is now perceived as a ubiquitous aspect linked to various facets of life, bringing to the core the subject of societal structure and wisdom. By terming Malabar culinary culture, it does not simply mean how food is prepared and consumed in a society, but rather includes the sophisticated culture in which how food is perceived in Malabar and its societal impacts. It is phenomenal not just for the dishes it serves, but also for the hospitality it emphasizes, which is an expression of their faith, culture and politics. It is a common belief that the people of Malabar are very broad-minded and hospitality for them, is of utmost importance (Abraham 2019). Food, they believe is a legitimate pleasure that should be enjoyed and shared in company, which reckons the famous Islamic notion of food being perceived as a god's gift to humanity and be shared amongst all. Food, therefore, is so festive and an important part of Malabar for bringing people together and strengthening their relationship. The birth of a child, circumcision of boys, ear-piercing of girls, marriage and even burying the dead, every occasion in Malabar is celebrated with special dishes. In Malabar, while dining, all irrespective of age, sit in a circle and eat together, though in gender-segregated rooms (Osella and Osella 2008). This is practised especially during festive occasions when people across religion are invited to homes (Mooza 2012). This culture of dining together and sharing the food is crucial as it emphasizes a sense of equality.

The question of whom to eat with is of primary concern, as the deep-rooted caste system in Hindu society prohibits inter-dining with people from lower caste and Muslims, as they consume meat which is considered polluting by people from the upper caste (Prange 2018, Major, 1857). Hindu upper caste people observe rigid ritual purity to the extent that most of them would not even take even a glass of water served by the lower caste (Pruthi 2004, p. 165). The caste discrimination and purity laws were even more obnoxious in Kerala which prompted Swami Vivekananda to describe the place as a 'lunatic asylum (Dash et al. 2020). Even though there exist class divisions among Malabar Muslims like the *Tangals* (Muslims of Arab origin and a highly respected segment of the society), and *Malabaris* (Native Muslims), they neither discriminated nor subjugated the weaker sections within the community, unlike the caste system in Hindu society (Kunju 1989). Albeit, caste privileges and untouchability practises got abolished post-independence, it is widely practised in Indian society even today. Therefore, inviting people to homes, sitting in a circle and eating together, along with people even of no acquaintance and not according to social hierarchy emphasizes a sense of egalitarianism, which is unique to Malabar. Through these gatherings, strong social networks are patched and burgeoned among communities which is a symbol of mutual acceptance, respect and solidarity. This culture of generous giving and cosmopolitan approach is strongly expressive of Malabar hospitality.

The migration to Gulf countries following the Gulf boom further widened the culinary knowledge and made it more accessible. Since a large number of people from Kerala to Arab countries following the Gulf boom belonged to people from lower strata of society, the flavors theretofore confined to the tables of rich and feudal class, become available to all sections. Apart from amplifying the culinary culture, the socio-economic remittances² gave a fillip to the state's economy and provided social and cultural capital to the marginalized sections, thus liberating a large number of population, especially from the caste prohibitions (Kannan and Hari 2020, Drèze et al. 1997). In the recent past, restaurants, cafeterias and bakery shops serving Middle Eastern dishes have sprung up in various parts of Kerala, even with an ambience that makes us feel like we are transported to an Arab land. Many of these restaurants were started by the Gulf returnees. Most of the dishes and flavors that belonged until recently to the Arab region alone, now became easily available not just in Malabar, but across Kerala. The restaurants serving Arabic cuisines became crowded with people from every class, caste, and religion, to subdue their unquenchable lust towards these ravishing flavors. Nevertheless, it is problematic to characterize these Arabian dishes as entirely authentic because Malabar restaurateurs had made significant adaptations, and decided to celebrate regional nuances by adding indigenous flavors. Albeit, these restaurants serve dishes both indigenous and exotic, to relish the veritable flavor of Malabar cuisine, one should taste the recipes prepared at local homes, where the heritage and traditions are preserved. In Malabar, serving guests with food purchased from outside is considered

ignominious, therefore the ravishing flavors of Malabar cuisine can be tasted in almost all households. Serving food in Malabar is not something related to embellishing the food or placing it on expensive utensils, but it is always about serving them with love, care and affection (Osella and Osella 2008). This warm hospitality is not confined to Muslim homes, but across religion in Malabar is overwhelming. Experimenting new recipes and accepting new influences, not only adds motley dishes to the cuisine but also is symbolic of the broad perspective the people of Malabar had on the societal structure. Similar to the influences Sultanates and Mughals brought to the culinary culture in North India and Deccan, Islamic influences in Malabar also honed the theretofore abstemious Hindu dining space, encouraging inter-dining and sharing food in rapprochement (Achaya 2012, p. 37).

Cultural appreciation is what quintessential

Human civilization was always about migration and movement, yet refugees, immigrants and minorities are perceived viciously in the modern world. India being no exception to the current global rightward shift, is flaunting a majoritarian character that abominates Muslims who are the largest minority in the country. Unlike Kerala, Muslims are ostracized and disenfranchised from the mainstream Indian society especially in the northern states, where communal and caste supremacy dominates every sphere. Though it has been centuries since Muslims came to India and their coalescence with Indian society, Muslims are now alienated from mainstream society and laws like the citizenship act which discriminates and even compels them to the verge of expulsion are implemented (Khan 2020). The cow slaughter ban in India has resulted in the lynching and flogging of Muslims by Hindu right-wing fringe elements in various parts of the country under the suspicion that they trade or consume beef (Siyech and Narain, 2018: 182). With all these incidents happening across the nation, Kerala is a flicker of hope. When food divides communities and creates strife in the rest of India, it is what unites the people of Kerala (Kannampilly 2003). This is evident with the huge furore that happened in Kerala against the beef ban in the country. The same unity was followed in the state to pass resolutions, unanimously against discriminatory and unconstitutional laws implemented by the central government, supported by Hindu right-wing. While many of the right-wing ruled states have initiated proceeding of citizenship amendment act, Kerala becomes the first state to have passed the resolution against the act in the state assembly (Nair 2019). The social mobility and economic capital, people from lower caste and minorities have gained is conspicuous when we compare the economic and social indexes of other Indian states with Kerala (Drèze and Sen 1997). Along with socio-religious reforms and political movements that helped the state to outperform other Indian states and to maintain harmony within society, the appreciation of each other's contribution, recognition and acceptance is what thrives Kerala society.

As discussed above, India is not the lone country that is contemptuous towards minorities. The cultural appropriation³ of dominant culture over the immigrant or the minority culture especially with the case of culinary practices is rampant across the world (Young and Haley 2008, p. 278). The Western and European nations have corporatized, appropriated and replaced Middle Eastern and African dishes, but not address the ongoing Islamophobia and racism, the people of color confronts (Ranta and Mendel 2014, p. 413). Similarly, Americans have a craving for Mexican food, but not care about immigration policy that affects the latter (Kiesert 2018). The people that monetize from these dishes without giving credit to immigrants and refusing to acknowledge their recipes, will result in obliteration of culture and even the existence of those communities. This is an extension of centuries-long racism, genocide and oppression only with the difference of taking a new form. Therefore, we as a society should contemplate on issues that impact the communities who have contributed immensely to the culture we live in and whom we are drawing our meals from. We also need to educate ourselves on majoritarian politics and prejudices that are contemptuous towards minorities, refugees and immigrants. To resolve this conjuncture, dominant communities should endorse and acknowledge the contributions by minorities and immigrants to the various realms of the society, which is what being followed and continued in Malabar culinary culture. When Israel serves dishes like hummus, falafel et al. as Israeli food or when the US appropriates burritos and tacos, with the deliberate attempt to shrug off the marginalized communities and reinterpreting the past (Ranta and Mendel 2014), Malabar serves Arabic dishes as such, giving full acknowledgment to Arabs and their contributions to their culture. Even the restaurants and bakery shops are given Arabic names like Zam-Zam, Le-Arabia, Al-Hassan, Zaatar Arabic et al. This cultural appreciation and diffusion which is not confined to culinary culture alone have played a quintessential role in building a civil, secular and democratic society not just in Malabar but across the state.

Conclusion

In this article, a preliminary step is taken towards recognizing the culture and contributions of *Mappilas* in Malabar, by exploring through their culinary activities, which later on played a crucial role in building a civil and cosmopolitan society. Culinary culture is an important marker of identity in all societies, as what we eat is an implication of our culture and values. When we learn a new recipe or taste a particular cuisine, we are connected not just to the lineage we never get to know, but we become acquainted of their struggle, displacement and history, not something that can be explained in a short description of a dish. Food being a major portal into culture, we should therefore embrace other cultures by trying their food, recognizing the people who contributed to it and be informed about their history. With cultural appropriation, xenophobia, and anti-immigrant politics taking roots globally and stamping out the culture of migrants, minorities and marginalized communities, one of the ways to counteract, is to portray the other side of the people subject to oppression, and there is no better way to do that than through food and their culture. Therefore, an attempt is also made to debunk the prejudices and stereotypes pertaining to minorities and immigrants in the contemporary world.

The cuisine of a place is the result of an evolution and contributions of different people who have passed through the region. The culinary legacy of Malabar, which we discussed here is also the resultant of a resplendent long term interaction which still continues exuberantly between the people of Malabar and the Arab region. The degree of interaction between two cultures is a major concern, because it revolutionized both the cuisine and the society. It shows as the life story of the men and women who make up not just the cuisine, but this prosperous and egalitarian society, where different cultures coexist harmoniously without overlapping or posing any threat to each other's existence. Malabar culinary culture is moving beyond from simply being recognized for well-known feasts and wholesome food to embracing the modern gastronomy, designed to bring people and culture together. The products and dishes that are considered essential in Malabar cuisine today are, in fact, borrowings from other lands that have assimilated over time. This exchange of ideas, cultures and traditions still continues, thanks to the movements especially between the two shores of the Arabian Sea.

Notes

1. The Hindu caste system stratifies society into four castes based on hierarchy – the *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaishyas* and *Shudras* – the *Brahmins* being considered the “purest” and the *Shudras* the “impure”. Each caste had a set of laws of purity and pollution that governed their interactions with other castes. The lowest castes were treated as untouchables – a segregation that expels them from mainstream public sphere (McKim 1990).
2. Migration occurs not only for sending economic remittances but also for social remittances like newly acquired skills, valuable knowledge and many other attributes to their country of origin. The concept of 'Social Remittances' is the flow of ideas, behaviours, identities, and social capital from host to home state. These remittances play a decisive role in boosting social, economic and political aspects of the home state (Levitt 2001).
3. Cultural appropriation is when a dominant culture adopts the cultural practices and ideas of a non-dominant culture without acknowledging or respecting the latter. Objects and traditions of marginalized cultures are seen by the dominant culture as something which can be translated to profits. This is one aspect of assimilation, in which marginalized communities lose their cultural identity and are folded into the dominant culture. Once the dominant culture has access to the cultural markers of a marginalized culture, they are gobbled up by the former (Young and Brunk 2009).

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