



Food as Signifying System in Urmila Pawar's Autobiography: The Weave of My Life

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Food is as important as thinking and reading to human. All human activates, physically, emotionally and interpersonally connected and depended on food. The food we eat represents what we are. It stands as the powerful image in the presentation of culture and social status. The food is also associated with other fields like anthropology, psychology, sociology, history, nutrition, geography and ecology. We can sense the particular bonding between food, personality, social origin, and geographical availability. Food plays an integral role in our culture; it has invariably crept into our writings and literature. Food customs evoke a plenty of associations in different writers' minds. Not only through the peculiar senses of smell and taste can food be perceived but also through the other senses. It helps to evoke a greater deal of "memories and feelings. Food imagery may appear, therefore, in literature as a source of deeply embedded associations that lead into the depths of individual and cultural memory. Here I am not telling about any cooking books or any food recipe, but about the literary works which describe the food. Post Modern culture has been greatly influenced by the food images and usages of food as metaphor. Recent interest in food studies has opened doors in literary studies to examine how the use of food represents complex ideas and deeper meaning in literature. Literary food studies analyze food as symbolism to reflect on cultural identity which includes various issues from social position to sexual desire to gender relations. Food carries multiple meanings. The writers' use the food and eating to symbolize cultural issues of acceptances, resistance, power and culture. It is also associated with emotions, narration, history and consumption.

When we start from the beginning, the search for food has helped to shape the development of society. It could be stated that at least food is history. In social psychology there exist significant food related topics such as religious food taboos, the unifying influence of the family meal, and the political nuances of hospitality. food is not only inseparable from the history of mankind but essential to it. Without food there would be no history, no mankind"

In this paper an attempt is made to trace the reference of food and its symbolic representation as signifying system in Urmila Pawar's autobiography *The Weave of My Life*. Food and its consumption are associated with physical as well as symbolic, non-biological sides of the life. Urmila Pawar throughout her

autobiography gives references food which was representation of the poverty and the situation in which they live. She belongs to Mahar community of Maharashtra lives in Konkan region, Later she lived in Mumbai. She gives us details of the way of life, their poverty and the food her community people prepare and eat. The regular food in every house is Bhakri or ambalee and dried small fish. Here bhakri and amalee both are made up of jawar. These people live in utter poverty most the men of her community didn't take the responsibility of the family their major portion of the earning was spent on drinking. Usually women run the houses by selling woods and bamboo baskets. If they have sufficient of jawar flour they used to make bhakri otherwise they used to prepare ambalee with the same amount of flour for four days, because it can also prevent hungry. Dried small fish is also indicator of their poverty. They didn't have money to buy fresh and good fish. They have habit of buying the large quantity of small fishes from the fishermen at the time of season and make them dry and keep them till the next season. Therefore they always use dry fish. Urmila says "Only a few people eat rice daily" it is again signifying the financial position. In her community poverty is common if they cook rice daily it means they financially good and can eat both Bhakari and rice for the meals. Urmila mentions that there were separate food items were cooked for the male members of the family it is symbol of the male dominancy and practice of male superiority in the family. Though the family responsibility was on women they were ill-treated, especially daughters-in-law were scolded for everything. She tells every child of her community waits eagerly for the festival. The children wait eagerly not actually for the festival but eat good food, because only at the time of festivals they prepare and eat good food. Urmila tells the food was always scarce in her house. Her father died very early, the responsibility of the family with five children was on the shoulders her mother, who was much miser. Her community people eat the flesh of dead animals, but it was forbidden in her house. Coarse rice grains brought from the ration shop for the lunch was their regular food. She writes, "We ate this rice with pithale, a cooked flour of pulses called kulith. Sometimes we had some leafy vegetables, from our backyard. Sometimes we had bhakri made of milo that is red jowar, a kind of millet or sometimes even of husk.we ate with bhakri with small inexpensive dried fishes with onions, red chilli powder with salt". They never used to eat fresh fish, unless they were tiny and cheap. These all food items symbolize their poverty.

In rainy season her mother used to cook pot full of leafy curry for both rice and bhakri. Her mother used to tell her children stories related to food and made her children to eat food with interest. At the time of festival special sweet dishes were made from the rice flour. When Urmila's father was alive her mother used to make modak and kheer at the time of Ganapati festival but later she has left cooking all those food items. Here modak and kheer are also symbol and healthy food. Urmila tells she heard the food items like ladu, karanjya and waran etc only after her sister's marriage. It shows that how they are socially isolated from other people because common food items of Maharashtra were unknown to them. Urmila mentions the names of the items cooked of fish by her mother such as, kaat, saar, and katyacha motal. These are the items made at the time of fish season, her mother used to buy small fishes by fishermen and dried them and stores them for lean days. Even after Urmila marriage her mother has sent some shell fishes with her as custom demands to send some edibles to husband's home along with the new bride. She tells ironically the mangos of Ratnagiri have reached Arab countries but not to us. It also very symbolic Ratnagiri mangos are very

famous for its taste and they have good market people of Konkan belt export them to the foreign countries to earn more money but never eat them. They used to eat ordinary mangos that too fallen and dried up mangos not fresh and ripen. They used to eat ordinary mango and jackfruit excessively because they are easily available to them. Urmila tells her mother used to give them jackfruit usually before meals. This sentence is symbolical and connected with poverty, her idea behind that was to save the food, whenever her mother brings jackfruit she used to cook less than usual. Her mother used to cook curry by using jack fruit seed or serve them boiled with salt. Urmila tells she never carried Tiffin box to school because in her house they never cooked the food worth carrying outside and she didn't want to face the embracing situation in the school because of her food moreover her upper caste friends didn't allow her to sit with them and share the food with them. Once all her classmates decided to cook a meal at her friend's house, whose parents were away. They discussed the things to be brought, Urmila was very eager with that idea and she was asking enthusiastically, what she has to bring, but they were trying to avoid her, finally, they said her to bring money. They cooked tasty dal, rice, and vegetables. Though they all eat together, they didn't allow her to touch anything. Next day she was horrified to hear the gossip of the girls. In Urmila's words 'she ate like a monster,' 'God she ate like the goat,' 'she ate so much of everything'. It was so humiliating that I died a thousand deaths that day". They insulted Urmila very much because she ate more compared with other moreover she has never eaten daal with so much vegetable at the same time she had never tasted the food with species because her mother always used to cook plain food with only chilli and salt. Other such incidents happened in her life. Once she attended the marriage at her sister-in-law's place along with her cousins. There they were enjoying the food and asking the cook to serve again and again. The cook said, "Whose daughters are these? They are eating like monsters". This comment has got multiple meaning. It shows the savage behaviour of those girls and greediness for food. In those day Uramila had greedy to variety of food to like her other friends in the school. But she has either sufficient food or tasty food. Whenever they got chance they started plenty of food. Moreover Urmila never attended the wedding with a grand feast. She had attended only the marriages of poor people of her community where only rice is served and guests would have to be satisfied with whatever is served because they can't offer more and sometimes they just ask the guest to bless the couple and go back home because they are too poor to treat them even with rice and curry. Whenever Urmila's mother fell ill she was suggested to eat the food collected from other house. This line suggests that the food eaten at their home is not at all healthy and it didn't have taste at all. It was eaten just to fill the belly. Usually they fed up with the same taste of unhealthy food and at that time if they eat other food it gives them little relief and help them to recover from illness. Urmila tells eating the flesh of dead animal was common in her community. This is also connected with poverty; because of hungry, her community people never think of hygiene eat even the flesh of dead animal. They use it for more than two days.

At her husband's home the entire culture was different she gave many references related to that also. The food referred by Urmila at her husband are different from her mother's there they prepare bhakri and rice every day, use coconut daily for cooking prepare palava once in a week all thses food are symbol of good financial position.

When she got job and shifted to Bombay her life was completely changed. Her life has become very busy. She tells her disagreement and argument between husband and wife. She writes Haricshandra quarrelled with her for preparing aloo and Chapatis on Sunday. It is symbol of all working women. Who didn't get sufficient time to cook and prefer aloo and chapti which is very easy to cook and didn't take much time. In case of Urmila it is same on other days she was in hurry to office but on Sunday she didn't want to waste her for cooking time because she has greater responsible of organizing the women's organization. The argument also conveys the meaning that her husband wanted to cook special dishes and spend whole Sunday with him and children. When she and her friends were struggling hard to organize the women association men commented on them like 'these women assemble to discuss the mundane matters like cooking and food what else they can talk'. This statement is also very significant because this line has multiple meanings. Men believed women are meant for only cooking, and they have strong notion that wherever women gather they only talk about the food and cooking. They condemn cooking but that is the fundamental activity of every home, indicates health, wealth, culture and the tradition of the family.

To sum up we can say the food is engaged in social issues in all the fields of human activity. Food's function as a boundary marker makes it a suitable tool for the construction and performance of identity. From a certain point of view food can be understood as "a reflection of what people feel and how they relate to each other, rather than a collection of recipes". In the autobiography *The Weave of My life* Urmila Pawar has perfectly used food as signifying system of her community, region and poverty of her people.

Work Cited.

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