

The Cornucopia of Banal Banquets; An Exploration of Food, Memory, and Culture
in *Crying in H Mart* and *The Hundred-Foot Journey*

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Certificate

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled “The Cornucopia of Banal Banquets; An Exploration of Food, Memory, and Culture in *Crying in H Mart* and *The Hundred-Foot Journey*” is a bona fide record of sincere work done by Olivia Sarah Binu, Register Number: 210011004035, Bharata Mata College, in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts in English Language and Literature under the Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam during the year 2021-2023.

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Declaration

I, hereby declare that the presented dissertation “The Cornucopia of Banal Banquets; An Exploration of Food, Memory, and Culture in *Crying in H Mart* and *The Hundred-Foot Journey*” is based on the research that I did on under the supervision and guidance of Ms. Merin Jose, Assistant Professor, Post Graduate Department of English, Bharata Mata College, in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of the Degree of Master Of Arts in English Language and Literature from Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam. This is a report based on the research done on the selected topic and it is my original work, and the interpretations drawn therein are based on material collected by myself. It has not been previously formed, or based on theses for the award of any degree, diploma or fellowship or other similar title or recognition.

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Introduction

This project analyses how food has become “incorporated into an individual’s personal memories, identities, and daily practices and also into the collective identities of communities, diasporas, and nations” (Jordan 36). This research meets at an interjunction of Food Studies and Memory Studies to effectively understand how food metonymizes memory, culture, and identity. The often-overlooked culinary traditions seem to hold a museumizing power. “It is not only a collection of products that can be used for statistical or nutritional studies. It is also, and at the same time, a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behaviour” (Barthes 24). It is a diacritic writing with numerous signifying markers for one’s culture, identity, and memory, which is at once a unifying force, a bridge between various nationalities. David Sutton looks at the body of food studies similarly by focusing on “corporeal cooking skill as an enactment of practical knowledge, sensory awareness, and memory” (Counihan 6).

The objective of this project is to disclose the interrelation between food and memory at a cultural juncture, and peruse how the association remains intact even in the face of culinary cultural conundrums. The theories which deal with memory have received much importance in recent times and a human being’s capacity to encode, store, and retrieve knowledge and experiences is looked at in detail. Understanding the processes that underlie memory formation and the factors that affect it has received a lot of research attention in recent times. One thing to keep in mind is the fallacious nature of memory, it being unreliable and prone to mistakes and distortions. Memory has another side to it which is false memories, in which people remember things that never happened, also shows how memory is prone to error.

Memory is not only important for theoretical and academic studies, but understanding memory also has applications in daily life. It has important uses in eyewitness testimony, education, and so on. Research in this field is sophisticated and opens up different dimensions to understanding human behaviour. Memory shapes peoples' identities, influences their perceptions of the world, and provides a framework for their understanding of the past. Memory plays a pivotal role in shaping individual and collective narratives, influencing social interactions, and constructing historical interpretations.

This project delves into the theoretical underpinnings of Memory Studies along with Food Studies, seeking to unravel the complexities inherent in human remembering. It navigates through a diverse range of perspectives, drawing on various disciplines such as psychology, sociology, history, cultural studies, and neuroscience to construct a holistic understanding of memory's intricate workings. Memories are not merely individual recollections, but rather products of complex social, cultural, and political processes. The study of collective memory delves into the formation of shared memories within groups, communities, and societies, exploring how these memories are negotiated, constructed, and manipulated, shedding light on how different groups and societies construct divergent narratives of the past to legitimise their claims, challenge dominant narratives, or reconcile with traumatic historical events.

The desire to remember home by fondly re-creating culinary memories cannot be understood merely as a reflectively nostalgic gesture; rather such commemorative acts must be read as a commentary on what it means to inhabit different diasporic locations while constantly battling the implications of routing memory and nostalgia through one's relationship to culinary practices. (Mannur 13)

Memories can be triggered by people, places, sounds, sight, smell, taste, touch, and so on. From the point of view of this project, food is a crucial subjective factor in triggering memories since it is not commonly thought of as something beyond its sustenance qualities. Individuals' psychological and physical growth is greatly influenced by their diet, which has a variety of implications for their general well-being. From a psychological standpoint, food affects mood, cognition, and emotional stability in addition to giving the brain the nutrition it needs to operate. Additionally, certain meals include particular substances that can increase the synthesis of serotonin, a neurotransmitter involved in mood regulation, such as dark chocolate, which is recommended by health experts for a person's overall physical and mental health. Additionally, eating habits and dietary choices have a significant impact on psychological health. In conclusion, food plays a variety of roles in both physical and psychological development. In addition to providing the fundamental building blocks for physical growth and development, proper nutrition has an impact on mental health, including how the brain works, how one feels, thinks, and behaves.

A remarkable phenomenon that penetrates the depths of one's sensory and emotional experiences is the ability of food to trigger memories. Human memory centres in the brain are tightly linked to the sensory components of food, including its odour, taste, texture, and even visual presentation. These sensory signals serve as triggers when an individual comes across particular meals that they have previously consumed, opening a floodgate of memories and feelings. The limbic system of the brain, which contains the amygdala and hippocampus—areas connected to memory and emotions—and the olfactory system, which is in charge of one's sense of smell, are intricately intertwined. Smells can have a significant influence on memory recall thanks to this relationship. A certain meal or ingredient may take an individual back in time and

place, bringing back vivid recollections of the people, occasions, and even feelings connected to that particular moment. A favourite childhood dessert's scent may quickly take one to joyous family get-togethers and set off a wave of nostalgia. Different tastes appeal to human palates at different points of time. The sight or smell of a dish a person once loved or even hated floods their mind with memories related to it. These memories might not always be nostalgic but could also be traumatic, for example, the sight of a food item served to refugees during some crisis need not evoke good memories. Food has an underrated power in facilitating communication which is much more effective than any language. Food doesn't discriminate against people based on gender, race, caste, class, nationality, etc. This project looks at the bright side of cooking and sharing food which reinforces connections, bridged gaps, and filled voids between people regardless of their backgrounds.

A handmade dish that has been handed down through the centuries may bring back fond memories of family rituals and help one connect to their cultural heritage. Different nations vary in their cuisines. A freshly made cookie's crunch may transport you back to the cosy warmth of your grandmother's kitchen. These tastes and textures can rekindle a variety of feelings, from comfort and delight to desire and melancholy. Furthermore, the social and cultural situations in which one eats also have a role in the ability of food to evoke memories. Significant events and life milestones frequently take place against a backdrop of shared meals and culinary experiences. Festive meals, family get-togethers, and private dinners with loved ones all leave a person with enduring memories that are entwined with the tastes and fragrances of the food consumed at the time. Cooking and eating together may be an expression of love and caring, creating bonds that will last a lifetime in one's memories.

Food can transport people back in time and bring back memories of past events that may otherwise have been forgotten. Food has a powerful tendency to transport individuals through the passageways of their past, whether it's the flavour of a favourite childhood pleasure, the aroma of a dish we've eaten before, or the experience of a group dinner. It acts as a channel for emotion, cultural identification, and nostalgia, serving to remind people of their identities and the diverse range of life events that have moulded them.

Food, indeed, is a big part of one's culture and the whole process of cooking and eating patterns might encapsulate a culture, like Chinese culture is known in the world to an extent, through Chinese cuisine. Similarly, food evokes a cultural memory, that is, food can represent individual as well as cultural experiences. Pizza and Pasta, which originated from Italy, is an integral part of Italian culture. The act of elaborate cooking in households and for gatherings is also a cultural event that constitutes cultural memory.

Two texts are primarily used in this study to analyse the correlation between food and memory at a cultural convergence. First, a memoir by Michelle Zauner, a Korean-American writer, *Crying in H Mart*, and second, a film by the Swedish film director Lasse, titled, *The Hundred-Foot Journey*. The novel is an autobiographical one for its representation of the author's relationship with her mother, who had succumbed to cancer, leaving the author in shards. The work shows the growth of the protagonist from a troublesome kid who took her mother for granted, eventually into one experiencing unfathomable loss. Although the novel touches upon the author's advancements and aspirations as a band performer, it is substructured on the ambivalent relationship between the writer and her mother during different junctures of their life. It was only at the verge of loss, that she was struck with the epiphanic understanding of her mother's value. Soon she learns cooking to provide a soothing, familiar presence for her

mother in her final days. After confronting the inexorable loss, she begins a journey to keep her mother's memories alive through the food she used to prepare, which they had savoured on different occasions as a form of penance and also to fill the void in her life, left by the death of her mother. She seeks comfort in food to keep the memory of her mother alive and to reconcile with her mother for troubling her as a reckless teenager. The protagonist projects her inexplicable guilt and suffering and finds a chance to redeem these by cooking up memories. Food is a frequent topic of conversation and even a major image in the work.

The film *The Hundred-Foot Journey* centres on the significance of food, serving as both a reflection and promoter of diverse cultures, while also being a vital conduit for encapsulating cherished memories. The film juxtaposes two cultures, namely the Indian and the French, and loudly establishes the Eurocentric notion of cultural superiority. The plot revolves around the Kadam family who owned a restaurant in Mumbai and who had moved to France after losing their mother in a communal riot following an election. Hassan, the lead character, serves as the head chef at their newly established restaurant, *Maison Mumbai*, which they opened in St. Antonin, a rural area in France, just one hundred feet apart from the prestigious and exquisite French restaurant *Le Saule Pleureur*, only to be shunned by its snobbish owner, Madame Mallory. The film depicts cultural rivalry interspersed with culinary practices that the Kadam family carried with them as the sole anchor to help them identify with their past. The film also paints a picture of how food is a convenient material possession for storing abstract memories using instances where Hassan cooks to relive the beautiful moments he shared with his deceased mother. The central characters seem to have different motives behind the cooking and consumption of various foods.

Both these works are placed in the backdrop of their cultures, namely Korean culture and Indian culture, and reveal much about specific cultural aspects along with the personal. Thus they evoke a cultural memory as well. These works, set in different cultural backgrounds, become relevant in this study for its common theme of food and depicts how food plays a major role in matters apart from basic goals of life sustenance. Food is indeed a silent language that communicates powerful emotions without any barriers.

Memory studies theory is the primary theory used in this analysis. David Sutton's theory, "Culinary Nostalgia" provides an interconnection between food and memory, and contributed a lot to this project along with certain other theorists like Jan Assman who proposed theories like Cultural Memory. David Sutton's theory integrates food studies and memory studies through his work, *Remembrance of Repasts* where he narrates personal experiences which he encountered on the Kalymnos Island of Greece in which foods and their sight, aromas, and tastes have evoked memories. Maurice Halbwachs, Jan Assman, and certain other prominent theorists had widely assessed the field of memory studies to come up with the multifarious aspect of Cultural memory which gains shape through collective memory. Such theories claim that individual memories are not independent thoughts or creations of individuals but rather a product of the society, history, and the memories of a group, that is, individual memory is a component of collective memory that formulates cultural memory and identity in its turn. This is true because the texts upon which this project is based on, inevitably draws attention to the culture in which it stands.

A Methodological Journey into Culinary and Cultural Memory

The theoretical framework of this project heavily relies on the field of Food Studies and Memory Studies to analyse the role of foods in stimulating memories and cultural consciousness, especially in migrant individuals. This study also examines the capacity of food practices in creating a cultural hegemony by presuming some cultures to dominate some of the others. This paper also stresses the often overlooked qualities of food, substructuring it with connected theories to illustrate how effective a medium it is.

A French sociologist, Maurice Halbwachs, widely known for his influential contributions to the fields of collective memory, social psychology, and the sociology of knowledge, is often endorsed as the founding father of social memory studies. He stressed the difference between individual and collective memory and provided the epistemology of the two groups. An individual's past consists of two kinds of memories or elements, out of which, certain elements can be evoked at any time, voluntarily. These elements might be easily accessible to an individual as well as to others. Such immediate events and recollections might be so to the group of people closest to us. One can remember them whenever desired since they are shared, that is, engraved in the memory of a collective group. Contrary to this, the other types of elements cannot be gathered anytime one wants, thereby presenting various obstacles no matter when they search for them in their past. This is so because these groups of memories spring from experiences that are personal. These elements that cannot be willfully recalled are known only to the individual. "While the collective memory endures and draws strength from its base in a coherent body of people, it is individuals as group members who remember. While these remembrances are mutually supportive of each other and common to all, individual members still vary in the intensity with which they experience them" (Halbwachs 142).

Currently, the concepts of identity and memory are widely discussed and debated. Memory studies, which appeared in the 1980s and peaked in the 1990s, penetrated a wide range of areas. There has been a fixation on memory in modern culture since it is associated intrinsically with identity. An insecurity regarding identity, which is a common phenomenon in a postmodern world, pulls more traction towards memory. “When identity becomes uncertain, memory rises in value” (Megill 194). “The Halbwachsian model holds that memory is determined by an identity (collective or individual) that is already well established” (194). To gain a clear grasp of the field of memory studies, it's crucial to distinguish memory from nostalgia. Nostalgia is the attraction toward a “real or imagined past”. “Whereas nostalgia is oriented outward from the subject (the individual person; the group), focusing attention on a real or imagined past, memory is oriented toward the subject and is concerned with a real or imagined past only because that past is perceived as crucial for the subject, even constitutive of it” (195).

Jan Assman, a prominent Egyptologist and cultural theorist known for his groundbreaking work in the fields of Egyptology, religious studies, and memory studies, through his research, has had a profound impact on human understanding of ancient Egyptian religion, culture, and the interplay between memory, identity, and society. He adds to these terms what he calls communicative memory, and distinguishes it from cultural memory. Whereas communicative memory comprises the past's images, which are embraced and transmitted from one generation to another within a confined perspective, and characterised by subjectivity while cultural memory is the residues of a distant past, which are accumulated over time and acts as a store of information and awareness, from which a group derives knowledge about its commonalities and peculiarities. It also guides behaviour and experience within the social

structure that develops over generations through repeated social practise. “Cultural memory has its fixed point; its horizon does not change with the passing of time” (Assman 213). “Memories may be false, distorted, invented, or implanted” (210). It is subjective and cannot be historically validated. Culture doesn't derive from memory; instead, it constitutes a kind of memory. The term “cultural memory” has roots in the word, *Mnemosyne*, from Greek mythology, since she was “the mother of the nine muses, her name came to stand for the totality of cultural activities as they were personified by the different Muses” (211).

Memory is the link that connects relations and is evoked through different means, in the form of objects, conversations, tastes, feelings, places, and so on. Diasporic memory is of special concern in this project as the texts analysed depict characters who are displaced from their original cultural environment. If these diasporic identities are bombarded with the question of what possessions would they carry with them as they depart or flee from their homes with a clear understanding that they are never going to return, they will stop to think of the value and importance of things. On the contrary, several of these individuals who haven't had the luxury to pick what is important to them due to the commotion and fury around them, find solace in several other markers that preserve the sweet memories of their homes. These are mostly the food items they used to consume at a particular point in time, with their special ones, or on certain occasions. “If you imagine an experience to be the construction of a memory, then its recollection years later can be defined as its *reconstruction*” (Malhotra 34). It is at this conjecture that Food Studies come into play and this intersection opens up multiple possibilities to tap into the world of remembering and forgetting. Food studies theory comprises an analytical framework that investigates the multiple characteristics of food that extend beyond its nutritional worth. The theory highlights the complicated links between people, communities, and the larger global

setting. It considers food as a lens through which one understands complex topics such as identity, power relations, sustainability, and globalisation, thereby enabling insights into food's tremendous effect on peoples' lives.

Human memory is ephemeral. Human experiences are cognitively stored as memories. One must understand their memory system not as a storage device because time gradually erodes those memories. When a human being experiences the stimuli for a second time, it brings back memories in a distorted or most probably, romanticised form and this explains the obsession with the past and nostalgia which laid the groundwork for research in the field of memory studies. When it comes to food in memory studies, it is discovered that taste and smell elicit past feelings more vividly than any other stimuli. Besides being a basic necessity as a source of life sustenance, food has become an important element that marks the connection to home in immigrant subjects. The urge to preserve the memory of a loved one or a culture by recreating culinary practices is widely popular and forms the base of this project.

Another important term in this study is “edible memory”, used by Jennifer A. Jordan, which according to her is “something people enact with regard to a whole range of foods—including some of the most highly processed foods around” (Jordan 5). This is the driving force of much social activity. “Edible memory encompasses ways of talking about the world, but also ways of acting on and moving through the world. I found edible memory propelling people into action—to save seeds, to plant gardens, to eat meals and tell stories” (11). Food also helps forge identities, social and cultural. It shapes individuals to give a sense of who they are. When chemically dissected, foods contain specific nutrients and have immediate impacts on the chemical structuring of human bodies. In turn, these food items evolve into cultural artefacts firmly grounded not just in physiological, cultural, and political systems but

also in the realms of memory and identity. Having established the importance of food in cultural contexts, it can be considered as an heirloom or a souvenir in the sense that one passes down the food they cook and eat, to their heirs, and they, in turn, to their heirs, which make a significant form of edible memory. According to Gordon M. Shepherd's concept of memory presented by Jordan, "The olfactory receptors connect smell, memory, and the brain in ancient and immediate ways" (33). The parts of the brain that deal with scent and those that form memories are close, and despite the other senses, smell isn't transmitted via the thalamus. The olfactory sense, which also happens to be the oldest sense, is considerably more crucial to experiencing flavour through taste. Much culinary memory has certainly been linked to the senses. Smell holds a distinct position in the brain, owing to the immediate physical connection to senses that triggers deep, tangible memory. When people eat a specific dish, they might be devouring "the memory of a relative or they may be eating a more inclusive and less personal sense of collective memory" (35). There are certain foods that get a collective group like a nation or community attached to it. Similar to this, people also get individually attached to certain foods through the experiences of their past or the time they spent around that food with a loved one. All kinds of food brim with memories which could be recollections from one's childhood, ancestral recipes carried down through generations, or collective national ties to certain delicacies. Memory, culture, and tradition may function in dynamic as well as static states. Even though ephemeral, certain tastes, textures, and scents may bring pleasure as well as comfort. Relying on other sources for the same does not often yield such effective results.

On the other hand, there is another meaning for edible memory, which is less direct and personal, its nature being cultural and collective. This second concept of edible memories is a key to approaching stories of the past, especially regarding a past that one has not directly

experienced. This is by eating the memories of other people. Through consuming other people's memories for a prolonged period, it is possible that those memories eventually shape their lives and narratives. This is how culture is formed, to a certain extent. "This closely resembles what Alison Landsberg refers to as 'prosthetic memory'—the sensation of experiencing a past we ourselves never lived through" (106).

Not only do foods produce memories of comfort and pleasure, but also those valuable ones of loved ones who no longer exist and also of the hardships one encounters. For instance, "When you bite into an apple of any sort, you are tasting hundreds of years and thousands of miles of history that all started in the forests at the foot of the Tien Shan mountains in Kazakhstan, where stands of wild apples still populate the foothills" (79). The foods of which individuals are passive consumers and the ones they take for granted would certainly have an elaborate cultural displacement which resides in the collective memory of multitudes of people. "Even the most supposedly exotic or unfamiliar fruit is likely someone's heirloom, someone's childhood memory or family staple" (184).

It is proof that tastes and aromas remain in one's memory longer than other media, the instances in which one connects something that has nothing to do with edibility, to a taste or smell that they have experienced in the past. One can smell and feel the taste of a photograph of a dish if their receptacles have even a distant familiarity with the objects in it. The conjuncture of food studies and memory studies is the point where food meets memory, culture, history, and identity. People learn to love specific foods and forget to appreciate others personally and as part of a culture. Taste is a multifaceted phenomenon, influenced by practice, memory, and culture as well as the chemical makeup of taste receptors and particular foods. Food tastes incredibly

personal, almost emotional. It is a crucial aspect of how people see the world and recognise their places in it. Still, a person's interests in food are moulded by the cultural settings they occupy.

When thinking about collective memory one needs to think about culture. In certain regions, contemporary culinary traditions closely mirror those from tens of millennia past, whereas in other areas, they have diverged significantly. An important food theorist, David Sutton, Professor of Anthropology at Southern Illinois University, views the body of food studies in a new and more positive light by emphasising physical culinary skill as an embodiment of practical skill, sensory perception, and memory. "Motivation studies have shown that feelings of inferiority were attached to certain foods and that people therefore abstained from them" (Barthes 27). Food embodies cultural values and negotiations between cultures, bringing forth a hierarchy among cultures. The analysis of food traditions and culinary patterns provides ample examples to illustrate how one culture considers itself superior to certain other cultures. This dimension is important in this project as one of the texts analysed reveals explicitly how certain third-world food cultures or previously colonised food cultures are deemed inferior by the colonisers' food cultures. The phrase, "You are what you eat", speaks for itself. Migrant subjects seek their personal and cultural identity, using food as a tool to explore the dimensions of class, ethnicity, caste, nation or region, and gender.

Individuals report positive feelings most often and negative feelings rarely in response to food-related memories and consumption, especially when it comes to self-selected foods. The sharing and trading of food among individuals also internalise interpersonal connections and alliances, rendering them deeply personal. Repeated sharing of meals produces powerful memories. Sharing foods constitutes "a tight knot drawn which binds together a group of people with a type of food and a modality of eating it" (Osella 196). Food is "a marker of difference and

cultural alterity, but also as a means of coming together” (Henderson 236). What a person eats has the potential to influence their bodies and hence ourselves, which is why there are numerous cultural and religious dietary restrictions and food taboos. Food and culinary behaviours can draw divisions between individuals and cultures. Another crucial differentiation when it comes to food studies is the distinction between fast food and slow food. There has been an international Slow Food Movement, which is a “celebration of slow food” (Henderson 242). “Its agenda is 'to change the rules of the game so that taste, cultural identity and regional individuality are not assimilated into, and homogenised by, a global food culture devoid of diversity and pleasure' ” (242). Recipes often build bridges and tear them down, and food forms the foundation for creating and explaining relationships.

Humankind's need to satisfy dietary requirements cannot be limited to merely biological, scientific, or even practical reasons. The notion of cultural fulfilment takes centre stage within every social category. Eating is a cultural act and thus a crucial component of both private and public life. Within this sophisticated culinary culture, there exist hegemonies. Similar to the segregation of nations as developed and developing, based on the national economy and technological infrastructure, a not-so-subtle distinction could be observed between the cuisines of nations that deem themselves sophisticated by undermining the food cultures of others. This cultural hegemony arises from factors like economy, colonisation, tourism, and migration. Sometimes even two cultures intermingle to form fusion recipes, which symbolise a cordial connection between two vastly distinct cultures. A closely related concept is the “other”ing of food cultures. Edward Said’s concept of “Orientalism” can be successfully applied to the field of food studies to examine how culinary practices, food traditions, and cuisines from different regions are often framed, represented, and understood within a framework of cultural

stereotypes, power dynamics, and hierarchies. Oriental food cultures are exoticised and considered as “other”, often perceived as a deviation from the presumed norms that are Occidental. This othering also tends to overlook the cultural diversities and intricacies of regional cuisines by generalising and simplifying the complex cultures. Media also play a crucial role in subjugating oriental cultures by depicting them as wanting in certain aspects, which stick to the stereotypes rather than breaking them.

From the point of view of this project, the subordination of “exotic” food cultures is illustrated using the culinary practices of countries such as India and Korea and how the immigrant subjects from these nations feel inferior when publicly expressing their food preferences and practices, especially in foreign countries like America or France. Throughout the European colonial era, colonisers frequently pushed their culinary habits on indigenous peoples, portraying their food as superior and dismissing local cuisines as savage or uncivilised. These instances demonstrate how food was utilised to promote cultural supremacy by portraying culinary choices as indicators of social and intellectual growth. In certain other instances, cultural appropriation takes place when dominant societies borrow culinary elements from less privileged societies and offer them as their own, frequently without proper acknowledgment or recognition of their cultural roots. This implies the notion that the less privileged culture undergoes a process of refinement through cultural transposition, thereby indirectly marginalising the original food culture. Western cuisines, which are usually associated with affluent cultures, are frequently viewed as the pinnacle of culinary quality, with French food often regarded as the epitome of elegance. This hierarchy argues that communities that consume Western cuisine are more evolved, educated, and elite.

With the given base, it is critical to understand that food has undergone evolution from being a mere life-sustaining agent to a global marker of culture, class, economy, community, and individuality. Detailed analyses of food production, consumption, and culinary practices might prove to be of utmost significance as compared to other media, food effectively transcends boundaries, creating imaginary homelands wherever one goes. Food helps one reinforce his links to the past. It is the key to the repertoire of memories, culture, and identity. People dine these days with different goals and recently a novel category called comfort foods has cropped up for people dealing with stress, sadness, or when seeking consolation as such foods, which vary for each individual, give a sense of assurance, warmth, and familiarity. These foods are known to psychologically induce positive responses and are coping mechanisms in this postmodern world, where people strive for temporary escapes.

Culinary Hegemony

This chapter deals with how food is used as a vehicle to carry cultural differences, more precisely, for backing up the claims that some cultures are dominant while others are marginal. One of how humans establish themselves as civilised is through food. But "civilised" is a nebulous term that is entirely in the perception of the viewer. Civilised individuals, for example, utilise utensils such as forks, knives, spoons, and chopsticks. Eating with hands is a practice that is looked down upon in the Western world. The relationship between the culinary cultures of Western countries like France and England with the East, particularly, the Asian countries is akin to the relationship between the Orient and the Occident, as claimed by Said as a type of connection that distinguishes 'self' and 'other' and is loaded with power and control. This chapter takes into consideration the cultural aspects of the analysed texts, *Crying in H Mart* and *The Hundred-Foot Journey* to see how these texts internalise the notion of cultural superiority and how they foreground the hegemonic structures through food. Intercultural communication and literacy are the only means to eliminate such rigid hierarchies among food systems.

The film *The Hundred-Foot Journey* (2014) reflects the French conviction that their culture is superior to all others. Since the dawn of Western civilization, European nations have perceived Asian and Middle Eastern people as unusual and as 'others'. As the title of the movie suggests, *The Hundred-Foot Journey* is not the metaphorical distance between two distinctly varying cultures like the Indian and French, but the physical distance between rival restaurants in the film, where entirely different culinary practices are followed. The Indian Kadam family, who had relocated to France after some political riff-raff in their homeland had started a restaurant in St. Antonin and named it 'Maison Mumbai' to commemorate their time in India, next to an upscale and extravagant French restaurant 'Le Saule Pleureur', run by the ambitious Madame

Mallory. This sets the backdrop for the culinary differences and illustrates how one culture assumes the centre stage.

The culinary traditions of France and India, as well as those of various socioeconomic classes, differ greatly. “The interpretation of different food cultures based on one’s own culture may lead to the preference of an ingroup food culture and a bias toward different food cultures” (Lin 25). In the film, *The Hundred-Foot Journey*, Mansur tells his obstinate father that “in case you didn't realise it, the French don't even eat Indian food. They have food of their own. It is famous all over the world” (*The Hundred-Foot Journey* 10:15-10:25). They assume the French will be uninterested in Indian food since it is not traditional. This statement seems to elevate French culture above Indian culture and also implies that the French treat their cuisine with great pride. French cuisine has been designated the label "modern cuisine" throughout the Western world. Historically, food, namely bread and salt was one of the driving forces behind the storming of the Bastille, succeeded by the French Revolution of 1789.

It is impossible to separate food from the French Revolution. More than any other revolution in history, food played a crucial part in the French Revolution, literally and symbolically. At the heart of the issue were two foods essential to the French people, bread and salt. And at the heart of the bread issue were the bakers. The French have been described as a nation of “panivores”—bread eaters—and regard their bread as the best in the world. Bread had both literal and symbolic meanings in French cuisine and culture. It was a source of nutrition, providing most of the daily calories, but it also represented health and well-being, the French identity, and the French religion, Catholicism. French bread was supposed to be wheat and white. In 1775, people rioted because they got dark bread. (Civitello 189)

Etymologically speaking, “The words connected with the restaurant are French. A soup that was supposed to restore the health was called a 'restorer'—in French, restaurant. Other French words are restaurateur, the owner of a restaurant; and menu, from the French word for “small,” because the menu is a small description of the larger dishes” (193).

Table manners are particularly difficult and extensive in the French cuisine culture because French people eat not just to satiate themselves, but also to express an attitude towards life. They consider their cuisine with high regard and a feeling of class. In contrast to Indian cuisine, which incorporates a multitude of spices, the French culinary tradition moved away from the use of excessive spices and sweet-and-sour flavours. This is evident in the film when Papa condemns French food in his conversation with Madame Mallory, calling them “awful, tasteless, empty sauces! With your pitiful little squashed bits of garlic!” (*The Hundred-Foot Journey* 1:09:35-1:09:46). Madame Mallory replies to Papa, saying, “That is called subtlety of flavor” (1:09:47). This conversation could also be viewed as one that sprung from a representative of Indian culture who felt intimidated by French culture, in foreign soil. Meanwhile, Indian cuisine is traditionally eaten with one's hands while sitting cross-legged on the floor, rather than using knives, spoons, forks, or chopsticks at home. As an Indian cook, Hassan is passionate about Indian cuisine and culinary culture, particularly Indian curry. He talks zealously to Madame Mallory about how the specials change at their restaurant each day, to which she replies “Mum. Mum. Well, curry is curry, is it not?” (31:42). She also declines and despises other foods like green *chili*, which Papa is very proud of, saying that Indian food has brought about “the death of good taste in St. Antonin” (41:07). Madame Mallory refuses to accept the lively Kadam, who is intent on doing things his way, ranging from the different foods cooked up in 'Maison Mumbai' to the music played on loudspeakers, serving as a dreaded contrast to her subtler, more refined

restaurant ambience which serves food for the most exquisite individuals. The film depicts a cultural clash, both gastronomic and otherwise. The “superior” culture also exhibits cultural insensitivity, in instances like Madame Mallory ridiculing the Indian cooking tools of the Kadam family when she asks Mansur, “Mmm. What is this? Mansur: It is an oven. Madame Mallory: Oven? It's not a drum? To play? Mansur: No. Tandoor oven for chicken tikka” (30:19).

Individuals who pass judgement on the cuisines and cultures of different ethnic groups using their own cultural norms or frameworks may find it difficult to recognize cultural differences, resulting in cultural bias and, furthermore, ethnocentrism.

Ethnocentrism refers to people regarding their ways of living, behaviours, values, living patterns, ideologies, and religions as the only positive and reasonable cultural schema. With cultural superiority over others, those with ethnocentrism tend to criticize other ethnic groups’ living patterns and cultures in comparison with their own ethnic and cultural values and thinking patterns. (Lin 26)

Those who exhibit an ethnocentric mindset see their own culture as the centre of everything and the rest is compared and assessed in relation to it. In general, ethnocentrism is characterised by a rigid, rigorous division between internal and external groups. Ethnocentrism can be classified as positive, negative, and extremely negative. Individuals naturally tend to hold a positive preference for their own ethnic culture over others, and this inclination is a natural phenomenon. On the downside, individuals may perceive their own culture as dominant and employ their cultural norms as a yardstick to evaluate other societies. Conversely, individuals with strong ethnocentric tendencies view their own culture as the dominant culture and anticipate that other cultures should conform to their societal norms and frameworks. As a result, persons with extreme ethnocentrism may engage in competitiveness or stigmatisation. In this light, the

actions of Madame Mallory and her chef, Jean Pierre, can be understood as an ethnocentric complex when he casually states that he “saw that Indian guy buying things in the convenience store. His cart was full of cat food. They don't even have a cat. I guess it was for the curry” (*The Hundred-Foot Journey* 29:06). French foods are believed to be neat, classic, and elegant, but Indian dishes are thought to be strong, spicy, and loud.

This ethnocentric worldview will also result in cultural intolerance, which in turn makes the other cultures feel inferior and shameful. Although Hassan takes pleasure in preparing Indian dishes, he aspires to transition from being a cook to a chef, seeking broader recognition and a chance to expand his expertise beyond the realm of Indian cuisine. He feels he must be formally schooled in French cuisine and culture since they are regarded as superior to Indian cuisine and customs. At one point, he seems to renounce his Indianness in his search for French cuisine and becomes successful as a world-renowned chef. But he constantly feels the call to reconnect with his roots and finally incorporates both cultures. Hassan enhances his culinary skills and creativity by integrating various food cultures into his dishes, enabling him to showcase the culinary artistry of a cuisine founded on multicultural communication and exchange. Papa teaches Hassan to embrace his tradition instead of seeking validity by imbibing the alien tradition by saying that the term “classical” fits India best since it is one of the oldest civilisations of the world. “Because of its location at the junction of Asia and the Middle East, India has been the site of a great deal of cultural exchange through many overlapping migrations. The first of these occurred approximately 65,000 years ago. Then, around 6000 B.C., people from the Middle East migrated east into India, bringing domesticated cattle, sheep, goats, and their experience growing wheat. Other people migrated west from China, bringing rice and later, tea” (Civitello 22). Each culture has its diverse history and embracing those will eliminate feelings of inferiority.

The memoir, *Crying in H Mart*, displays Korean-American characters struggling to hold strong to their ancestral culinary traditions by sharing food to organising food hunts at several restaurants in Philadelphia. Although not about cultural domination, there are quite a few vivid instances where the protagonist feels out of place among her peers and in general as an American citizen with a diverse Asian background. Here too, a culinary hierarchy or stigmatisation is felt by Michelle, and in her desperate attempts to fit in, she renounces Korean food and vehemently resents her Korean mother's advice as a teenager. The eponymous H Mart is an international Korean grocery supermarket and Michelle feels like it is the only place where her Koreanness is justifiably represented and respected as compared to the rest of the places of such kind in America. "It's the only place where you can find a giant vat of peeled garlic because it's the only place that truly understands how much garlic you'll need for the kind of food your people eat. H Mart is freedom from the single-aisle "ethnic" section in regular grocery stores. They don't prop Goya beans next to bottles of sriracha here" (Zauner 3). The "single-aisle" ethnic sections in other grocery stores make Michelle frustrated as this is symbolic of the minimal representation that other food cultures receive, hence feeling marginalised or unwelcome, with a constant feeling of alienation.

"There was something in my face that other people deciphered as a thing displaced from its origin like I was some kind of alien or exotic fruit" (95). Michelle constantly felt displaced, being a racial minority. She felt belonged neither in America nor in Korea as she is half of both. The only tethering factor which linked her to her Korean identity was the food, which even though she enjoyed very much, had to be kept away during her school days to fit in and be recognised as an American around her friends. "I didn't belong. Until then, I'd always been proud of being half Korean, but suddenly I feared it'd become my defining feature and so I

began to efface it” (95). She had to pretend to be liking American food to be in sync with her American friends.

I asked my mother to stop packing me lunches so I could tag along with the popular kids and eat at the shops off campus. Once, I was so petrified that a girl would judge what I ordered at a coffee shop that I ordered the exact same thing as her, a plain bagel with cream cheese and a semisweet hot chocolate, blandness incarnate, a combination I never would have chosen myself. (96)

She was also forced to repudiate her middle name to mask her Koreanness as the society was hostile towards “other” cultures, often treating those individuals as inferior. Letting go of her mother’s name was painful to her and she recalls the experience in her memoir. “Worst of all, I pretended not to have a middle name, which was in fact my mother’s name, Chongmi. With a name like Michelle Zauner, I was neutral on paper” because “people accidentally pronounced it ‘Chow Mein,’ but really I had just become embarrassed about being Korean” (96). She often vented her feelings to her mother: “ ‘You don’t know what it’s like to be the only Korean girl at school,’ I sounded off to my mother, who stared back at me blankly. ‘But you’re not Korean,’ she said. ‘You’re American’ ” (96).

Michelle had a complex relationship with whiteness. At once, she desired and rebelled against it (Ugwueze 164). Her statement, “I was pretty in Seoul, maybe even enough to have a shot at minor celebrity” (Zauner 36), meaning that she never felt pretty in America because of her “exotic” look and due to the food she consumes. But ultimately, just like Hassan, Michelle too embraces her true, mixed identity through food as an anchor to her memories of her deceased mother. She no longer feels limited by her Koreanness. Individuals who comprehend culinary hegemonies tend to break it, thereby ending the rigid cultural distinctions. Just like American and

French cultures, Korean cuisine too, is complex and classic. The only differences among the world cuisines are the proportion and appropriation of various ingredients. Only Western nations had their social and culinary history documented in the beginning. This might be one of the factors why the culture and history of the East went on, often unacknowledged and hence considered inferior. Even though soup is believed to have originated and popularised in France, similar dishes were consumed around the world under different names, almost at the same periods. Soups were also part of Korean cuisine. “Soup provides the liquid during a meal; beverages like rice water or barley water are consumed after. What Americans would consider dessert—rice cakes or fruit—is eaten between meals as a snack” (Civitello 329). Cultural relativism is the solution to ethnocentrism. “Cultural relativism is often interchangeably used with multiculturalism, a synonym of ethnic pluralism. Due to internationalization and globalization, interactions among different cultures have become more and more frequent, leading to a combination of different cultures” (Lin 28).

Thus, both these works display how food becomes a vehicle of cultural domination and one can notice how oriental characters struggle to take pride in their culture and cuisine. As a result of ethnocentrism, cultural intolerance surfaces which can be mitigated only through cultural relativism. Nevertheless, the following chapter furnishes substantial evidence from both Indian and Korean culinary traditions, highlighting the cultural wealth of each, regardless of their geographical positions.

Gastronomic Materialisation of Memory

Food memories are an intriguing and essential part of the human experience, combining sensory perceptions, emotions, and cultural factors to form long-lasting recollections. Taste, scent, sight, and even touch combine with an individual's emotional state and the environment in which people eat food to develop these memories. Some people find comfort and healing in making the deceased one's favourite foods as an avenue to pay respect and maintain the relationship. If the deceased individual had a strong interest in cooking or food, engaging in culinary activities may feel like a way to reconnect with their passions and pass on their legacy. "Food engendered social relations in a way other consumables, such as alcohol or fashion items, did not" (Haeney 12).

David Sutton has widely used the term "synesthesia" in the context of food studies and attributes the amazing capacity of food memory to synesthesia—the crossover or synthesis of distinct sense registers. Food interacts and overlaps with smell, vision, taste, touch, and even hearing. Sutton in his preface to *Remembrance of Repasts* provides a personal experience associating food with remembering:

Food also became my own peculiar mnemonic, as visits to my parent's friends always provided the hope for me of some new and interesting culinary treat. Thus when my parents would ask me, "Do you remember So-and-So?" whom we had met two years ago, my stock response was "What did we have for dinner?" This ability of food to both generate subjective commentary and encode powerful meanings would seemingly make it ideal to wed to the topic of memory. (Sutton 6)

Material memory is another area to be explored in this analysis since food can be considered as an object with varying significations. “Objects stimulate remembering, not only through the deployed mnemonics of public monuments or mantelpiece souvenirs but also by the serendipitous encounter, bringing back experiences which otherwise would have remained dormant, repressed or forgotten” (Kwint 2). The living cherishes the dead through many items, with food being one of the most significant. The most popular link in this chain of food and memory is the remembrance of Christ, as in the Last Supper, when Christ provides bread “in remembrance of Me”.

Both the texts analysed in this project show the intense bonding of characters exceptionally facilitated through cooking and dining. In *The Hundred-Foot Journey*, some of the major characters like Hassan, Marguerite, and Madame Mallory access their memories through cooking. Similar methods are employed by Michelle, who discovers a sense of reconciliation and catching up to the lost time with her mother, Chongmi in *Crying in H Mart*.

The opening scene of *The Hundred-Foot Journey* exhibits a marketplace in Mumbai where the young protagonist Hassan and his mother Akhiya go to procure groceries for their family restaurant. They are fixated on a vendor selling sea urchins and follow him, despite the chaotic surrounding. Several people scream to the vendor, offering him more money to have the sea urchins. This scene reveals the remarkable knowledge of food he gained from his mother. Hassan is entranced by the exquisite aroma he finds in it and seeks out them, and the merchant is so thrilled that he sells the basket to his mother. “Sold! To the boy who knows” (*The Hundred-Foot Journey* 2:15-2:20). The next scene which discloses how important a symbol the sea urchins are in their life reveals his mother cooking them in the kitchen with a grown-up Hassan standing on one side of the pot. “The sea urchins taste of life” (3:54). The following

sequences show how communal violence following an election dismantles their restaurant and how their mother was trapped in between the blazing ruins that took her life. The family then prepares to move on to Europe to recommence their business there since they can never have their life back in Mumbai after the profound loss.

It is evident that Hassan's mother was an integral element in his life in the scene where the Kadam family goes through interrogation after applying for a visa. "My mother was my instructor" (3:50) and his university was their restaurant in Mumbai. His schooling ended on the night of her death. When asked about his professional qualifications, he responds that his culinary skills were nurtured by his mother, instilling a deep passion for cooking, but mostly he was trained to taste the food. Food also becomes a significant component of the family's history, an object of pride, uncovered when Hassan tells the officer "My family has run restaurants in India for many years. My great-grandfather fed soldiers during the time of the British Raj" (2:44-2:5). This holds significant importance and brings them great joy in their memories.

However, after her death, Hassan vows to continue his "education" to rediscover and enliven the memory of his mother by cooking what she taught. The Kadam family, which moved to France, comprises Hassan, his Father whom they affectionately call Papa, and his siblings, Mahira, Mansur, Aisha, and Mukhtar. They decided to carry on with their legacy and rebuild the memories of their home by opening a restaurant in St. Antonin, which they named 'Maison Mumbai'. However, there is the intimidating presence of an exquisite French restaurant, '*Le Saule Pleureur*' just across the street, merely a hundred feet apart from their restaurant. The restaurateur, Madame Mallory, is also embarking on a similar journey as that of the Kadam family, to cherish the memories of a loved one, through her restaurant. The town's Mayor explains to Papa the reason behind Madame Mallory's relentless dedication, which drives her to

work tirelessly day and night to attain Michelin stars for her restaurant - “The restaurant is her entire life. Ever since her husband died, she keeps it up for him” (48:42-48:48). Madame Mallory endeavours to preserve her husband's memories and aspirations by upholding the restaurant's legacy.

Even the description of food has the potential to bring mouthwatering memories to one's mind. When Mansur advises Papa to abandon the notion of opening an Indian restaurant opposite the esteemed *Le Saule Pleureur*, citing that even the President of France frequents the place and French diners may not have a penchant for Indian cuisine, Papa responds, “Is the President of France able to order *murgh masala*, with cashew nuts and cardamom? Is the President able to order *tandoori* goat, cooked the way Hassan cooks? Sprinkled with roast spices?” (19:39-20:02). In this heartwarming scene, on hearing Papa speak, Mukhtar and Aisha were taken back to their home in India and to the times they had relished, dining with their deceased mother. Following this they decided to set the restaurant idea into motion, with Hassan as the main chef. One night, while he was cooking, Papa advanced towards him with a box of spices, which initially belonged to his mother. Hassan is surprised to see the much-prized possession and tells Papa, “I thought this was lost in the fire” (33:01), which points to the indestructible quality of memories no matter how ephemeral they are. He runs his fingers over the spices and smells each one of them, inhaling the memories of his mother, taking them to the core, just as he did with the sea urchins as a little boy. This unleashed a torrent of memories within him, leading his eyes to brim with emotion.

In one of the scenes, Hassan has an intimate conversation with his love interest, Marguerite, about food. When she asks him what his favourite dish is to cook, he replies,

Jalebi.

Marguerite: What is that?

Hassan: Uh...Fermented *dal* and flour, deep fried.

Marguerite: Mmm.

Hassan: The smell reminds me of my mother.

Marguerite: You're lucky. The smell of pigs' feet in vinegar reminds me of my father.

Hassan: Food is memories.

Marguerite: Food is memories. (47:28-47:56)

Later Hassan embarks on a different journey in his professional career, as the chef at *Le Saule Pleureur*, after his restaurant was burned down out of spite by one of Madame Mallory's chefs. Over there, he cooks fusion food by incorporating Indian spices into French traditional cuisine. Though he may no longer exclusively prepare Indian cuisine, he desires to preserve the memory of his mother through fusion cooking. He incorporates the spices from his mother's spice box as a means of reconnecting with his former self and capturing the comforting essence of his mother's presence, reminiscent of the warmth they shared while cooking together. Even later when he moved to Paris to work in the world-renowned restaurant, *La Baleine Grise*, known for its experimental cuisines, he used his Indian flavours to bring popularity to himself as the chef who brings down Michelin stars. The restaurateur of *La Baleine Grise* reveals the motive of the restaurant to provide food that caters to different senses, "At *La Baleine Grise*, we believe that eating is a multi-sensory experience, and certain combinations of flavors and aromas activate enzymes and stimulate specific parts of the brain, evoking pleasure, and also recollections of pleasurable experiences. Like a certain scent will remind you of your first love. Yes, with food you remember" (1:36:06-1:36:31). In that place, he strikes up a friendship with an

Indian chef who serves dishes cooked by his wife, evoking the exact taste of his mother's culinary creations. He could not contain his emotions and asked his coworker,

Where did she get the spices?

Him: I have them send it from home. You know, it's cheaper than a flight ticket.

Hassan: It's got *amchur*.

Him: Yes.

Hassan: And *kala jeera*.

Him: Yes. A little bit of *garam masala* also. Every bite takes you home.

(1:43:32-1:43:59)

At this new restaurant, he sees sea urchins being cooked and is immediately transported to his past. He reminisces about his family, with his mother holding a prominent place in his thoughts, and he weeps quietly in a dim corner. Following this emotional moment, he resolves to visit St. Antonin. On reaching there, goes to Marguerite and tells her “I want to cook a dish that I haven't cooked in a long time. With you” (1:49:22-1:49:30), and they proceed to cook the sea urchins. He wants to recreate the most cherished memories he had with his mother, now with Marguerite. He smells them as passionately as ever and adds spices to them from his mother's spice box. Even after conquering heights of fame, there is a void left in his heart, which can only be filled with the food he prepared with his mother. The movie concludes with him presenting the sea urchins to Madame Mallory and the Kadam family members, transporting them all to a more peaceful era before the communal riots disrupted their lives.

The text *Crying in H Mart* also provides crucial insights into food memory through the lives and experiences of its main characters. The text opens at the eponymous H Mart, “a supermarket chain that specialises in Asian food” (Zauner 3) and grocery. The start of the story

reveals that Michelle's mother passed away some time ago. She later revealed that, “you’ll likely find me crying by the banchan refrigerators, remembering the taste of my mom’s soy-sauce eggs and cold radish soup. Or in the freezer section, holding a stack of dumpling skins, thinking of all the hours that Mom and I spent at the kitchen table folding minced pork and chives into the thin dough (3)”. The store, in its entirety, along with the food it offers, evokes vivid memories of the moments she shared with her mother during childhood and adolescence while shopping there. “On my birthday, we ate *miyeokguk*—a hearty seaweed soup full of nutrients that women are encouraged to eat postpartum and that Koreans traditionally eat on their birthdays to celebrate their mothers” (4). This shows how Korean culture places great importance on food and commemoration of the dear ones using food. She recalls her childhood when her mother lovingly prepared her school meals just the way she preferred, filling each dish with affection. Standing in the food court of H Mart she envisions herself and her mother at one of the tables and gets transported to a time when her “Mom showed me how to fold the little plastic card that came inside bags of Jolly Pong, how to use it as a spoon to shovel caramel puffed rice into my mouth” (5). It is evident that the beautiful moments Michelle had with her mother were usually accompanied by food and it is this food that connects her to her joyful past.

Michelle's deep affection for her mother is quite remarkable, and she expresses it vividly in her memoir: “My first word was Korean: Umma. Even as an infant, I felt the importance of my mother. She was the one I saw most. In fact, she was both my first and second words: Umma, then Mom. I called to her in two languages. Even then I must have known that no one would ever love me as much as she would (198)”. She has not moved past the death of her mother and gets reminded of her everywhere she sees food. While she often forgets the exact date of her mother's passing, the cherished food memories they created together during their travels across

the US and Korea remain etched in her memory. Her life was immersed in the world of food so much so that she could not contain herself even at the slightest sight of others enjoying their food. Every dish and every nurturing mother served as a poignant reminder of her deep loss. She reminisces about every trip she took to Korea with Chongmi, noting that the repetitive nature of their food choices created a familiar pattern.

"Korean-Chinese was always the first thing we'd eat when my mom and I arrived in Seoul after a fourteen-hour flight from America" (8).

The author speaks about losses that have severely impacted her and admits that she is in H Mart not only for grocery shopping but also to revisit the past. "Within five years, I lost both my aunt and my mother to cancer. So, when I go to H Mart, I'm not just on the hunt for cuttlefish and three bunches of scallions for a buck; I'm searching for memories" (10-11). H Mart reminds her of her family, especially the deceased ones, and how they lived before, beautiful, and full of life. Chongmi died when she was fifty-six, and Michelle was twenty-five at that time. As time went on, Michelle absorbed her mother's culinary preferences for various occasions. She could anticipate what Chongmi would enjoy after a day of shopping and where she would choose to have her dinner because her mother was someone who had her "usuals" until she got tired of it one day and abruptly moved on. She even differentiated between "steamy hot" and "steaming hot", which suggests that she was extremely picky. However, Michelle was careful enough to idealise her mother and pick up all the bits and pieces of her. She was also aware of her allergies, her cravings, and the amount of food she could consume without getting sick. Similarly, Chongmi also recalled all of Michelle's preferences and dislikes. "She remembered if you liked your stews with extra broth, if you were sensitive to spice, if you hated tomatoes, if you didn't

eat seafood, if you had a large appetite” (14). She took note of even Michelle’s favourite side dishes to make sure she had an ample supply of them the next time they were consuming that.

Michelle also recollects how flavourful her childhood was with all the Korean food that her mom had made for her. Koreans had a habit of delighting in the search for and sharing delectable meals with loved ones as a way to express their affection. Michelle’s grandmother dwelled in Korea and her refrigerator reminded her of the times she had with her mother prowling for any leftovers.

At home, I was scolded if I got caught poking around the pantry past eight, but in Seoul, my mom was like a kid again, leading the campaign. Standing at the counter, we’d open every Tupperware container full of homemade *banchan*, and snack together in the blue dark of the humid kitchen. Sweet braised black soybeans, crisp yellow sprouts with scallion and sesame oil, and tart, juicy cucumber *kimchi* were shoveled into our mouths behind spoonfuls of warm, lavender *kong bap* straight from the open rice cooker. We’d giggle and shush each other as we ate *ganjang gejang* with our fingers, sucking salty, rich, custardy raw crab from its shell, prodding the meat from its crevices with our tongues, licking our soy sauce–stained fingers. Between chews of a wilted *perilla* leaf, my mother would say, “This is how I know you’re a true Korean. (28)

This ornate description of vivid and minute details expresses how important an element food was in moulding their relationship. Most of the conversations happened around food and hence all meals were immersed with an abundance of memories. Bonding through the food culture was important to Chongmi so much so that Michelle’s boyfriend Peter was taken out to a Korean restaurant to be introduced to her parents. Her mother was proud to give any food

suggestions and had a dish suitable for each occasion, even for each disease. Whenever her mother visited her in Philadelphia, where she was dedicated to her studies and music career, she always left a lasting impression with her food. “I remembered how after our scrubs, my mother suggested we stock up on groceries at H Mart so that she could marinate some short rib at my house and I could have a taste of home after she left” (46).

Even though it is a memoir written to commemorate her mother, other characters who have inseparable connections with food, like Michelle’s friend Nicole and her mother Colette’s memory of Nicole’s grandmother preserved using the heavy metal iron used in making *pizzelles*, which is an Italian specialty. When Chongmi was diagnosed with a rare form of stage IV squamous-cell carcinoma, Michelle had desperately tried to learn cooking for her to keep alive their shared memories and to keep her from withering away. In her early adulthood, Michelle experienced numerous conflicts with her mother, often arguing over trivial matters. However, despite these disagreements, her affection for her mother remained unwavering. These challenging moments were also intertwined with memories of shared meals. When she found out that her mother’s days were numbered, she considered cooking food for her and being there for her as penance for the days in which she shattered her heart. “I fantasized about the delicious food we’d make together, finally repaying my debts, giving back some of the love and care I’d taken for granted for so many years. Dishes that would comfort her and remind her of Korea. Meals prepared just the way she liked them, to lift her spirits and nourish her body and give her the strength she’d need to recover” (75). Michelle had hoped that stirring up memories of her Korean culture through food would lift her spirits and magically recover her back to a healthy life since she was not ready to accept the slipping away of someone closest to her.

Michelle and her mother flocked to the stores that sold Asian specialties hoping to “reviving bygone memories of her (Chongmi’s) childhood, conjuring new recipes to capture old tastes” (79) since their visits to Korea were not so frequent. Chongmi, in her turn, incessantly craved the taste of her mother’s food, while searching in the aisles “as she investigated frozen bags of mixed seafood and *pajeon* flour mix, likely trying to discern which was most similar to the ones Halmoni would use” (80). For Michelle, *kimbap*, which is a Korean dish made of rice, pickled radish, spinach, carrots, beef, and sliced omelet, triggered memories of the times when mothers would take turns to provide dinner at school each week and it was this dish her mother prepared each time it was her turn. After the preparation, they feasted on the leftovers before she took it to school.

In her later confessions, she says that eating food the Korean way was the only thing required to impress her mother. “Once, when I was a kid, I had impressed my mother, intuitively dipping a whole raw pepper into *ssamjang* paste at a barbecue restaurant in Seoul” (93). Eating without any inhibitions or disgust impressed Chongmi and she used to call Michelle a “true Korean” for the way she ate. She had cherished this memory so carefully and remembered her mother each time she craved something that the Americans could never accept the taste of. At the point where her mother was extremely sick, they had invited a friend of hers, Kye, to provide a soothing and familiar presence. She prepared *jatjuk*, which conjured up memories in Michelle, of the days when she was down with some ailment, her mother always prepared this for her better health. Now that she is in a critical stage, this porridge is given to her as part of desperate attempts to revive her back to health. *Jatjuk* is “a pine nut porridge my mother used to make for me when I was sick. I remembered her telling me that families make *jatjuk* for the ill because it’s easy to digest and full of nutrients and that it was a rare treat because pine nuts were so

expensive. I recalled its thick, creamy texture and comforting, nutty flavor as I watched the porridge thicken in the pot” (98). Michelle wants Kye to teach her the preparation of elaborate Korean dishes that Chongmi loved, to reciprocate the warmth and affection she had shown her up until that point in her life. “Food was an unspoken language between us, that it had come to symbolize our return to each other, our bonding, our common ground. Cooking my mother’s food had come to represent an absolute role reversal, a role I was meant to fill” (98).

Food memory is not just about taste or smell but also about visual and tactile experiences. The act of eating also forms part of a shared memory which implies that food is more than just about sustenance and serves as a testament to the power of food to encapsulate moments in time and relationships, even simple actions around food evoking powerful emotions. In the narrator’s love life, food plays an important role. Michelle gets proposed to, by Peter, on the way to one of their favourite restaurants. It’s a reminder that food has been a backdrop to their love story, and this proposal adds another layer to their bond that was officiated with food. “On the walk to the restaurant, on a random street in the Pearl District, he got down on one knee” (134). She also shares instances of seasonal memories centred around food, back at the time when her mother was alive and well. “My father and I would spend the day picking apples and when we were finished, we’d return to the marketplace to weigh them and pick three pumpkins to bring home from the patch. One year, when I was seven or so, my dad threw a rotten tomato at me and every year thereafter we’d have a tomato fight at the end” (156). There was a tradition of visiting their family orchard which is rooted in food-related activities such as picking apples and selecting pumpkins. The act of the narrator’s father taking her to the orchard and spending the day picking apples is a poignant example of family bonding through food. The fact that the tomato fight became an annual event after that initial playful act shows how food memories and traditions can

evolve. What started as a simple, unexpected gesture became a cherished yearly event, demonstrating the enduring power of food to shape family narratives. She also loved this memory because that was a point in time when her mother was still alive.

Food memories also revolve around meals that provide comfort. Michelle began to see her mother in her dreams frequently and underwent therapy to get over her wave of grief. “I was paying a hundred-dollar copay per session, and I began to think it would be much more fulfilling to just take myself out for a fifty-dollar lunch twice a week. I canceled the rest of my sessions and committed myself to exploring alternative forms of self-care” (212). This is how she turned to cooking her mother’s recipes in favour of her memory, calling it an alternate form of therapy.

Every dish I cooked exhumed a memory. Every scent and taste brought me back for a moment to an unravaged home. Knife-cut noodles in chicken broth took me back to lunch at *Myeongdong Gyoja* after an afternoon of shopping. Crispy Korean fried chicken conjured bachelor nights with Eunmi. Licking oil from our fingers as we chewed on the crispy skin, cleansing our palates with draft beer and white radish cubes as she helped me with my Korean homework. Black-bean noodles summoned Halmoni slurping *jjajangmyeon* takeout, huddled around a low table in the living room with the rest of my Korean family. (212)

Subsequently, she continued to cook her mother's recipes, aiming to replicate the exact taste, in hopes of finding solace and easing the immense pain caused by the thought of losing everything. This process replaced despair with the comforting notion that something good remained. While cooking, Michelle even mimicked her mother’s gestures and imagined how she would do things if she were there. Through cooking, Michelle wanted to “rediscover her, trying

to bring her back to life in any way that I could” (168). She later explains the reason behind her fixation on cooking incessantly,

The memories I had stored, I could not let fester. They were moments to be tended. The culture we shared was active, effervescent in my gut and in my genes, and I had to seize it, foster it so it did not die in me. So that I could pass it on someday. The lessons she imparted, the proof of her life lived on in me, in my every move and deed. I was what she left behind. If I could not be with my mother, I would be her. (223-224)

Every day and on every occasion, she began preparing elaborate meals so as not to lose her grip and fall into the abyss of grief as she did right after her mother’s death. Finally, after trying out different recipes to regain the missing piece of herself, she craved something that her mother had in her final days. “I found myself with an inexplicable craving for the porridge. The meal Kye most often prepared for my mother, one of the few things she’d been able to stomach” (189). Hence she prepared it by referring to Maangchi’s videos, only to understand that it was what her heart wanted. “This plain porridge was the first dish to make me feel full” (190). At the same time, it offered her comfort and grief as it brought to her mind the image of her dying mother and her blistered tongue. The bland soup enriched her with the flavour of love, which she was seeking. Maangchi also provided comfort with her reassuring presence, as she shared similar mannerisms and a racial background that reminded her of her mother.

Following her marriage to Peter, they were unable to embark on a honeymoon due to her mother's illness and eventual passing. It was after a certain duration that they decided to go on a honeymoon in places where her mother wanted to take her before dying. They first went to Korea, to one of Chongmi’s sisters, Nami, which healed her a bit as it meant a lot to her to “share

food with her, to hear these stories. How I'd been trying to reconnect with memories of my mother through food" (204). Later Peter and Michelle visited Gwangjang Market situated in one of Seoul's oldest neighbourhoods where her memories were stirred up by the pungent smells of the street food. She recalled the group of women she used to go there with, most of whom have since passed away. Her mother would purchase items from there to bring back to Eugene, providing a taste of home. Being in that place also served as a reminder of how her mother used to dress when she was in the kitchen, cooking. "These were the last memories my mother had wanted to share with me, the source of the things she raised me to love. The tastes she wanted me to remember. The feelings she wanted me to never forget" (206).

Michelle even tried alternate forms of expression, like writing, to sustain her mother's memory; writing about "Korean culture and the food we ate, how it summoned the memories of my mother I wanted to keep closest" (235). Before her mother's passing, she had created memorable moments for others too, such as Yunie, her art school instructor, who wrote a heartfelt letter addressed to Chongmi even after learning of her passing, cherishing the moments they had shared. She emphasised the times when they "drank coffee with a sweet loaf of bread that you (Chongmi) always brought to class. We laughed at so many funny stories that we all told" (166).

Out of all these culinary chronicles, *Kimchi* deserves special importance as the fermentation symbolises the grieving process of the characters in the novel who have experienced the loss of their loved ones. By cooking her mother's favourites, she is giving a rebirth to her mother just as fermentation provides the vegetables with a second life. The narrator details her journey of making two different *kimchis* using the traditional vessel, *onggi*. "I picked up a medium jar. It was heavy and I had to hold it with both arms. It felt hardy and ancient. I

decided to buy it and try my hand at the ultimate trial and Maangchi's most popular recipe—*kimchi*" (214). Even though the whole process was tedious and took up more than three hours, it was soothing and the scents provided a warm feeling of familiarity to her. Also keeping herself busy helped her not think too much about what she lacks. "I would think of how my mother always used to tell me never to fall in love with someone who doesn't like *kimchi*" (216). Several months after Chongmi's death, Michelle stumbled upon her mother's *kimchi* fridge while she was at her in-laws's house. "In the vessel that had housed all the banchan and fermented pastes my mother stored and cherished, were hundreds of old family photographs" (221). This made it a literal carrier of memories that contained photographs of multiple occasions with no proper order, period or landscape. They stored pictures of her parents before her birth, that of her as a little girl. It housed the pictures of her taken at various points of her life. Even though her mother was absent in most of them, she knew that it was her behind the camera, which provided her with overwhelming emotions. The *kimchi* fridge however became a literal and metaphorical container of memories.

The novel ends with Nami taking Michelle and Peter to Chongmi's favourite restaurant in Seoul. There they converse about her mother, her aunt, and her grandmother, all of whom have passed, and imagine them having a good time in heaven "playing *hwatu* and drinking *soju*, happy we are here together" (238).

Therefore, both of these works illuminate the cultural diversity inherent in various societies by presenting a vivid portrayal of their intricate culinary traditions. Additionally, this chapter has examined the mechanisms through which memory finds tangible expression in the ephemeral realm of food, hence proving the invariable relationship between food and memory, irrespective of the culture in which they occur.

Conclusion

This project has demonstrated the importance of culinary traditions and has illustrated their evolution from what was once considered mundane and basic to something of extraordinary cultural significance. Consumption of food is largely viewed as an act that incorporates emotions, joys, and sentiments, as well as the construction, maintenance, and development of identities. Food is an intrinsic component of who one is, and not just because it breaks down as blood or bone but our gastronomic practices - what one consumes, the foods and food manners one associates with childhood, and other occasions involving dining, festivals - are critical elements of their identities. In the project's introduction, an overview of the theoretical and analytical framework for the subsequent chapters is presented. It elucidated the inherent connection between food and memory in preserving one's cultural identity and offered apt analogies drawn from broader contexts. The chapter also offers a brief introduction to key theorists and their contributions within the realms of food studies, memory studies, and cultural studies. The second chapter titled "A Methodological Journey into Culinary and Cultural Memory" provides a detailed exposition of the adopted methodology, which amalgamates elements from food studies, memory studies, and cultural studies. The chapter scrutinises these theories at their intersection points and prepares ground for the analysis of the considered texts, *The Hundred-Foot Journey* and *Crying in H Mart* from an unconventional standpoint. Food assimilates into an individual, with each person making their unique contributions to the culture they inhabit. In this way, food transforms abstract ideas into tangible realities and consolidates individual experiences, ultimately playing a direct role in shaping culture. This chapter introduces the theoretical formulations of popular thinkers like Maurice Halbwachs and Jan Assman, who claimed that cultural memory is a combination of several cultural practices with

culinary activities occupying a central position. It also deals with diasporic memory and the dissemination of cultural memory through food practices. Instances from the history of France that gave impetus to the French Revolution were provided to convey how important food is in shaping the destiny of a nation's culture.

The third chapter titled "Culinary Hegemony" elaborated on how food acts as a reflection of cultural practices, thereby constituting cultural memory. This chapter also analyses the concept of Ethnocentrism, drawing instances from both the considered texts to show the impact of food and culinary stereotypes in creating and maintaining impediments between two cultures by creating hierarchies based on the choice of ingredients. Ethnocentrism is similar to Eurocentrism in this analytical context. The fourth chapter titled "Gastronomic Materialisation of Memory" focuses on the extraordinary and obscure power of food in summoning memories of places, people, and moments of the past. The primary emphasis lies in exploring how the characters cope with their losses by turning to food as a replacement. Food serves as a source of solace, acting as a protective barrier that shields the protagonists from experiencing profound and enduring grief.

Culture is the common ground between food and memory. The intricate tapestry of individual memory is often interwoven with the broader threads of cultural memory, particularly when it comes to food. Food is not merely sustenance; it's an experience, a shared ritual, and a symbol of an individual's personal and a community's collective histories. When one recalls the aroma of a dish that their grandmother used to prepare, that memory is not just personal but rooted in a larger socio-cultural context. The spices used, the techniques employed, and the stories told as one cooked all tie into a collective narrative of a community, region, or even a nation. Thus, individual memories around food often act as a portal, offering a glimpse into the

deeper reservoir of cultural memory. Through these gastronomic experiences, one can not only connect with their past but also with the shared pasts and traditions of their ancestors and their culture. “There is an imagined community implied in the act of eating food “from home” while in exile, in the embodied knowledge that others are eating the same food. This is not to deny that real communities are created as well”(Sutton 84). David Sutton in his *Remembrance of Repasts*, remarks that the awareness that there are several people out in different regions of the world sharing the same food creates a cultural unity and this aspect of food also enables cultural memory apart from individual and collective memories. A noteworthy aspect to consider is that these individual memories, awakened through food, play a role both directly and indirectly, in enriching the collective memory bank, subsequently shaping the web of cultural memory. So individual experiences have a greater cosmic magnitude when viewed through a broader lens. Understanding other cultures is possible through the consumption of their foods. This offers insight into the flavours of a region, the culinary techniques employed, the influence of climate and topography, and more, all of which are integral elements of their cultural identity. Apart from serving as a source of materialising memories, food also provides comfort and facilitates forgetting like in instances where Michelle and her father went on a trip and “ ate the sandwiches in our bunk beds, capping them off with .5 mgs of my father’s Xanax, and worked our way through a plastic bag full of glass bottles of 333 beer until we were impaired enough to sleep through the train’s violent sways along the track barely two feet wide” (Zauner 172). Participating in culinary endeavours can also serve as a way to preoccupy the mind and temporarily divert it from getting distressed by traumatic memories of the past.

The field of food memory, from a cultural standpoint, holds immense potential for future exploration and application. As the world becomes increasingly disconnected and diverse, the

study of how different cultures preserve, transmit, and adapt their culinary traditions through memory becomes vital. This knowledge can foster greater cultural understanding and appreciation, helping to bridge gaps and promote tolerance. Furthermore, it can stimulate creative approaches to the education and safeguard of culinary traditions by eliminating stigmas associated with different cuisines which ultimately contributes to hegemonic discourses.

Understanding the gigantic significance of food leads to the creation of repositories of traditional recipes, augmented reality experiences that transport individuals to distant kitchens, or immersive culinary storytelling that brings historical meals to life. Food memory studies can also play a pivotal role in understanding cultural commonalities and can bind human beings. Food memories can inform more sustainable food practices. Through a deeper understanding via research into the correlation between food and memory, people are not only preserving individual gastronomic heritage but also forging a path toward a more culturally enlightened and harmonious future.

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