

# DISCOURSE OF FOOD IN KIPLING'S *KIM*, FORSTER'S *A PASSAGE TO INDIA* AND SCOTT'S *THE RAJ QUARTET*

Sujan Mondal

“Tell me what you eat and I will tell you who you are”

-Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin

Food is an essential component in the making of identity, and is inextricably associated with cultural identity; it not only constructs and defines but retains the distinctness of the religious-cultural groups in a multi-cultural society. Food from production to consumption serves as a prominent constituent of identity maker. Ideological dominance often influences the dietary habits of the people of the multicultural society. Therefore, food serves as a dominant signifier of identity, and is deeply associated with the social, cultural and political aspects of society. There has been a massive influx of food industry in the twenty-first century and, therefore, it could be considered to be an age of “food explosion”. The emergence of food industry gives a new meaning to the food culture. With the emergence of numerous TV shows, cookery books, and ongoing food researches have redefined and reshaped the importance of food beyond mere means of survival. Until recently, food becomes a subject of growing academic interest. Robin Yasin Kassab, a British-Syrian novelist exploits food as a trope in his narrative fiction *The Road from Damascus* (2008).

Food contributes significantly in the construction of identity. Going beyond mere nutritional ingredients, food is also a potential signifier of one's identity as referred to in the famous dictum of Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, French epicure and gastronome (1755-1826) that “Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are”. The discourse socio-cultural aspects of food and its importance in the construction of one's identity is manifested as “Food, the most significant medium of the traffic between the inside and outside our bodies, organizes, signifies, and legitimizes our sense of self in distinction from others who practice different food ways”(Le 231). In this context, the role of ethnic food is more prominent in Diaspora as it not only “constructs” and “defines” but retains the distinctness of the cultural group or concerned person in a multi-ethnic context. Food, therefore, broadens the discourse of inextricable relationship between food and identity.

Food has an inextricable relationship with culture, and is strongly associated with religious, and national identity. Freud's concept of *jouissance* reveals that the adoption and rejection of certain food habit could be seen as “the key to the formation of one's identity” (Li 232). The psychological consciousness of food significantly brings about ethnic identity. In “Towards a Psychological of Contemporary Food consumption”, Roland Barthes proposes the grammar of food:

If food is a system, what might be its constituent units? In order to find out, it would obviously be necessary to start out with a complete inventory of all we know of the food in a given society (products, techniques, habits) and then subjects these facts to what the linguists call transformational

analysis, that is observe whether the passage from one fact to another fact produces a difference in signification. (Barthes188)

Barthes considers the multifaceted aspects of food as he says that food “shapes one’s identity, culture and society and distinguishes from other group. He also talks about the psychological aspects of food. Besides being a communicator, food also serves as symbols. In “Understanding Culture; Food as a Means of Communication” Nevana says that “food is not just a sight for sharing meaning, rather a place over meaning”. Claude Levi-Strauss and Eivind Jakobson reflect on the communicative aspects of food.

Food is an important aspect which significantly contributes and through which one significantly articulates one’s identity. The choice of food is not just based on a matter of plate, rather, culture, climate, religion and customs. The religious “concepts of holy and forbidden food” also dictate the dietary habits of the individuals. Some foods are also considered to be not “appropriate” for certain religious groups. Irrespective of nutritional values, taste and quality, the religious belief and cultural affiliation equally make a food holy and unholy. Muslims and Jews are very particular about the ways of slaughtering animals. Judaism strictly follows the dietary rules known as “Kosher”. In Islam, slaughtering of an animal makes it halal (permissible) and haram (forbidden). *The Quran* clearly states that (the manner) the process of slaughtering an animal. Moreover, the religious “concepts of holy and forbidden food” also dictate the dietary habits of the individuals. Through myriad ways, one ways one / an individual can assert identity.

Food acts as a symbol of identity in the colonial and postcolonial India. In “Identity as symbols: “a matter of symbols””, Gabriel Marranci posits a similar bianarism that identity is a process with two functions: On the one and it allows human being to make sense of their autobiographical self. On the other hand it allows them to express the autobiographical self through symbols (Chambers 118). Nawal El Saadawi in “Why Keep Asking Me about My Identity” that “identity politics is a problem assigned solely to those who are being postcolonized....”.

The twentieth-century colonial literature has represented the Oriental customs, religions, festivals, languages and diverse culture and cousins of the subcontinent and thereby Oriental life. Their understanding and representation are deeply influenced by the local Indian culture. They represent the Oriental landscape, flora and fauna and concomitant Oriental aspects and associate exoticism with the Orient. The representation often British representation of India and the Orient locale and images are portrayed from colonial gaze. Three major British writers Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936), E. M. Forster (1879-1970) and Paul Scott (1920-1978) represent the three periods respectively. Rudyard Kipling, the Nobel Prize-winning British writer expounds the myth of the racial superiority of the English over the natives in *Kim* (1901). E. M. Forster represents the British-Indian encounter and conflicts of colonialism in his acclaimed novel, *A Passage to India* (1924). Paul Scott is another writer who revisits the Quit-India period of 1942-1947 in *The Raj Quartet*, which is a tetralogy comprising *The Jewel in the Crown* (1966), *The Day of the Scorpion* (1968), *The Towers of Silence* (1971) and *A Division of Spoils* (1975). While exploring the Orient, dietary habits of the natives find a prominent place in the writings of three prominent British writers, Rudyard Kipling, E.M. Forster and Paul Scott.

Scott dwells upon diverse Oriental food habits manifesting the rich cousins of Indian culture. By incorporating the Oriental dietary habits reflecting the traditional native culture, Scott adds local colour to his narratives. He refers to Indian spicy Indian dishes which the English detest. The Indian “spicy food” cooked in the open over charcoal fires finds mention in Scott’s narratives (*The Day of the Scorpion* p.53). But few English men show deep liking for the rich Oriental foods. Daphne Manners savours the rich and diverse Indian cuisines like—chicken tandoori, chicken pulao, onion pickles, saffron rice at Hari Kumar’s house. The typical food habit of Bengali people who, Scott says “won’t eat anything but rice”. Scott’s literary Orientalism is manifested when he asserts about the adamant dietary habit of the Bengali people who would “rather die than change their damned diet” (*The Day of the Scorpion* p.140). Scott also introduces the image of rural Indian people and their dietary habits, like piping hot *chapatti*, dal, curds and tea. On her expedition to the countryside, Mildred Layton enthusiastically ingests the traditional rural Indian foods cooked by the village women. Scott says that colonial memsahib, “Mildred had gallantly drunk cup after cup of syrupy tea, eaten piping hot chapattis, a bowl of vegetable curry” (*The Tower of Silence* p.252). The non-vegetarian dishes like beef and mutton, chicken, bacon and fish are found in Indian dietary habits. In the Anglo-Indian party, Mr. Srinivasan regrets “the absence of the beef and the omnipresence of the mutton” (*The Jewel in the Crown* p.172). Scott further points out that how the “vegetarian food” is associated with Nationalism, particularly Hindu Nationalism. The Hindu nationalism, as Scott defines, stands for “sitting without shoes, and with your feet curled up on the chair, eating only vegetarian dishes and drinking disgusting fruit juice” (*The Jewel in the Crown* p.172). Moreover, the English dislikes Indian foods, particularly the Indian ways of cooking food with *ghi*, a traditional cow milk product. Hari Kumar writes to his Colin Lindsey, his London-based friend about his cultural shock about Indian foods that “There’ll be a smell from the compound of something being cooked in *ghi*. My stomach will turn over at the thought of breakfast” (*The Jewel in the Crown* p.157). Another prominent character, Daphne Manners also expresses her dislike for the foods cooked in *ghi* and says that “I’ve never been able to stand anything cooked in *ghi*, which affects my bileduct immediately” (*The Jewel in the Crown* p.255).

The cooks in the English households were supposed to be Muslim and they are famous for their cooking skills. In “Oriental Servants in Paul Scott’s *The Raj Quartet*”, Mondal argues that in the hierarchy of the Oriental servants, cook, particularly Muslim cook, stands tall in comparison with other servants. They are considered to be the prized employee among the native servants. Almost all the cooks employed in the kitchen of the English family in India are Muslims. The diaries of the memsahibs and British colonial fiction testify to this fact as the Muslim cook, with his generic name Abdul, cook different varieties of non-veg, particularly meat, for their colonial masters and memsahibs, while the Hindu/ Non-Muslims in India do not touch meat for their religious issue. On the other hand, a Hindu (Christian or Non-Muslim) was given the charge of Bar as serving and consuming of wine is *haram* (prohibited) in Islam and Muslim servants follow it strictly. The Hindu servants generally hold the responsibility of serving wine the English masters/Memsahibs. Most of the colonial writings aptly represent these things in their respective writings. But in Contrary to the facts, Scott depicts the Muslim servants who appear to be drunkard and cook pork for their English masters in *The Raj Quartet* (Abbasi and Mondal).

Ziauddin Sardar states that “Muhammad proscribed for Muslims the flesh of animals that are found dead, blood, swine's flesh, and food that had been offered or sacrificed idols. The most radical departure of *Qur'anic* from

Mosaic dietary laws was in connection with intoxicating liquor". Following the scriptures, the Muslims do not touch/ eat pork. Likewise, the Hindus do not eat beef, considering cow as "holy" in Hindu religion. Scott notes that holy cow and unholy pig are the cause of communal strife between Hindu and Muslim in the British India in *The Raj Quartet*. Following the Bibighar garden, the rumour about the six Hindu youths "forced to eat beef" at police custody causes riots in Mayapore during the Quit-India period. Scott further says that "the Jailers were Muslims and some sent in for them was mistaken by an orderly for food sent in for the prisoners who were all Hindus" (*The Day of the Scorpion* p.189). While bringing out the horrible effect of the communal problems during the Quit India Movement (1942), Scott says that the tolerance between the two communities has widened to a great extent that a rumour provokes the Muslims to set on fire a Hindu shop and the Hindus retaliate "by slaughtering a pig outside the Abu-Q'rm mosque" (*The Day of the Scorpion* p.182). Far from being an identity maker, food serves as "dominant site of economic, cultural and political struggle" therefore, acts as a metaphor in the narrative of *The Raj Quartet*.

In the narratives, Kipling also incorporates dietary habits of the Asians in *Kim*. Throughout the novel, he delineates different types of the food, like "rice and good curry, cakes all warm and well scented with hing [asafoetida], curds and sugar". In comparison to English, the Oriental dishes are considered more spicy and flavour-rich. Kim desires for spicy Oriental dishes at St Xavier. Kipling recounts Kim's desire that "his mouth watered for mutton stewed with butter and cabbages, for rice speckled with strong scented cardamoms, for the saffron-tinted rice, garlic and onions, and the forbidden greasy sweetmeats of the bazars" (*Kim* p.127). Sweetmeats are very important part of Indian cuisine and Kim craves for it "bring food — curry, pulse, cakes fried in fat, and sweetmeats. Specially sweetmeats" (*Kim* p.197). Mahbub Ali eats various dishes on different occasions and "stuffed himself with great boluses of spiced mutton fried in fat with cabbage and golden-brown onions" (*Kim* p.133). At another occasion, "Mahbub hired a room over against the railway station, sent for a cooked meal of the finest with the almond-curd sweet-meats (balushai) and fine-chopped Lucknow tobacco" (*Kim* p.133). Kipling seems to have confused with dietary habits of the Muslims as he depicts "a flap of soft, greasy Mussalman bread" gives to a boy (*Kim* p.22). There is no such bread available on the subcontinent called Mussalmani bread. Kipling also points to dietary habits of another Muslim that "The Hakim sleeps after meat". However, a non-vegetarian food on some occasion can be termed as *halal* or Mussalman food but qualifying bread as Mussalman is misleading. The non-vegetarian food is prohibited in Jainism and Buddhism.

After his illness, Kim has been taken care by Sahiba in the hill. Sahiba nourishes him to health by different kinds of healthy food. She possesses indigenous knowledge and she prepares nutritious food having medicinal value. She "took spices, and milk, and onion, with little fish from the brooks — anon limes for sherbets, fat quails from the pits, then chicken-livers upon a skewer, with sliced ginger between" (*Kim* p.276). Kipling highlights the mysteries of the Orient in the food. While referring to Sahiba he says "She brewed drinks, in some mysterious Asiatic equivalent to the still-room — drenches that smelt pestilently and tasted worse" (*Kim* p.276).

Smoking *hookah* and chewing *pan* are two habits of the people in the South Asia. Kipling depicts the lifestyle of the natives: "the banker, the cultivator, and the soldier prepared their pipes and wrapped the compartment in choking, acrid smoke, spitting and coughing and enjoying themselves. The Shikh and the cultivator's wife chewed pan" (*Kim* p.33). Unlike the West, consumption of alcohol looked upon a bad habit. Among the Indians, the Muslims do not drink wine. Kipling projects the Muslims drinking wine in *Kim*. Despite follower of Islam,

Mahbub Ali drinks wine which, as Kipling says that “they fell to drinking perfumed brandy against the Law of the Prophet, and Mahbub grew wonderfully drunk” (*Kim* p.25).

Forster has a sympathetic attitude towards India/ Indians, but the narration and description of the novel betray streaks of negativism. By breaking the colonial myth of white man’s superiority in the novel, Forster must have experienced the “anxiety of influence” and “anxiety of difference” in his approach to British-India. But his novel displays the amazing interplay of cross cultural understanding marred by chasm, misconceptions and misprojections. His misprojections are reflected in the historical chronology, description of locale and his approach to Indian women etc. in the novel. Although he follows the liberal humanistic approach in *A Passage to India*, yet few prejudices get reflected in his representation of India. Indian critics take on Forster’s cross-cultural understanding/ mis-understanding and castigates for his double standards in the novel. Despite huge success of the novel, these prejudices and misprojections reduce *A Passage to India* into “A Passage to less than India.” The Indian critical perspective has significantly contributed to the postcolonial debate on the novel.

### **Oriental Hospitality**

Forster portrays the hospitable nature of Aziz. But the representation seems to have follows the typical Orientalist representation. Likewise, another Oriental character also appears to be hospitable in the novel. Forster lavishes praises on the hospitable nature of the Nawab Bahadur also known as Zulfiquir:

This opinion carried great weight. The Nawab Bahadur was a big proprietor and a philanthropist, a man of benevolence and decision. His character among all the communities in the province stood high. He was a straightforward enemy and a staunch friend and his hospitality was proverbial. "Give, do not lend; after death who will thank you?" was his favourite remark. He held it a disgrace to die rich. (*A Passage to India* p.16)

Forster also encounters new customs, tradition and value system in Aligarh. Forster seems to have developed the idea of Oriental hospitality from his first hand experience at Aligarh during his stay with friend Syed Ross Masood. Masood arranged country expedition for Forster. While wandering at the local adjacent village of Aligarh, they “were welcomed by a local dignitary who gave them “tea and musk pills” and at “another village they were welcomed with a feast” (Furbank 226-227). While staying at Aligarh, Forster also got familiar with Oriental dietary habits and typical Oriental fruits/foods. He enjoyed diverse foods like “tea, poached eggs, pilau rice at Ansari house where he found several visitors sitting crossed leg and eating plates of rice”. He also has been sent several gifts like beetle nut, and cigarette which he perceives “whether Oriental I have no means of knowing, but isn’t English “(Furbank 228). Forster also mentions the Oriental perfumes and the trend of offering “scent” as gifts to the guest. He has been gifted scent by their host at Aligarh and in Delhi. He had sent few gifts to Lily in England saying that “some were roses etc., but I chose you the queer ones. The one that smells of smoke is made of earth and the other is of henna” (Furbank 226). He also describes the Indians’ habit of sharing bedroom as he himself experienced it at Ansari’s guest house in Delhi where he had to share bed with Masood. The representation of the hospitable and manifests Forster’s sympathy for the Muslims characters in the novel.

Forster was acquainted with the typical Oriental aesthetics as he says that “I realised what *nautch* must be to Indians” (Furbank 228). Dr. Ansari threw a party of dancing girls, called it *nautch*, at the middle of the city to entertain Forster. Forster considers the Oriental dancing girls as “weak but very charming face and charming manners”. Forster “enjoyed” the music, “harsh voice” of the dancing girls who evoked his emotion with their “very charming face and charming manners”. In his letter, he vividly describes the events that “the drum would thunder in on the last note that excited us... and the singer sank down in our midst, with her scarlet and golden robes spread round us, and sang love songs” (Furbank 229). Dr. Ansary made him kiss those girls. The Evening enjoyment brings him connected with another crucial British- Muslims political aspect of the time. But this entertainment turns out to be nightmare for the Muslim as very next day *London Times* published derogatory news of evening *nautch* considering it to be “Orgy” of the Indian agitators on the verge of Turkish defeat. Having seen the dancing of the girls Forster is of the impression that could “lapse” an individual into an Oriental.

Following the trail of his predecessors, Scott also writes about the British Raj in India and the century-old stereotypical images about India resurface in *The Raj Quartet*. Throughout the *Quartet*, Scott evokes the stereotypical negatives images of India. In *The Jewel in the Crown*, the epithet “disgusting” appears many times related to India and its affairs like “disgusting food”, “disgusting fruit juices”, and “disgusting jail house”, “disgusting third class compartments” of Indian train, “disgusting poverty”, and “disgusting embryo”. Scott equates squalor and poverty with what India actually is. While describing the native place of Chillianwallah Bagh, on the opposite side of the civil line, Hari Kumar perceives:

Narrow dirty streets, its distinguishing poverty, its raucous dissonant music, its verminous dogs, its starving mutilated beggars, its fat white sacred Brahmin bulls, and its rugged population of men and women who looked so resentful in comparison with the servants and other officiating natives of the cantonment. (*The Jewel in the Crown* p.15)

While describing “Real India”, Hari Kumar expresses his cultural shock like any English in India: “I remember my own revulsion, my horror of the dirt, and squalor and stink and knew that Colin would feel a similar revulsion” (*The Jewel in the Crown* p.178). After landing in India, the English *ayah*, Edwina Crane also experiences cultural shock and Scott evokes her apprehension as “the native town had frightened her with its narrow dirty streets, its disgusting poverty” (*The Jewel in the Crown* p.15). On being asked about the reason of drinking cheap Indian liquor, Hari Kumar retorts that “he’d got drunk because he hated the whole damned stinking country, the people who lived in it and the people who ran it” (*The Jewel in the Crown* p.272). Moreover, the typical Oriental diseases like typhoid, cholera, leprosy and Eastern drugs are also portrayed to be integral part of Indian culture. Sara Suleri calls the colonial representation of the native view as “cultural nightmare” (Suleri 89).

Food has an inextricable relationship with identity. Scott minutely observes the lower section of India society and describes the addictions of the natives in *The Raj Quartet*. He also talks of all kinds of Oriental addictions like *hooch* (cheap indigenous distilled alcohol), *bidi*, *hookah* and *pan* (beetle leaf). Unlike the English and upper-class Indians who drink wine and smoke cigarette considered to be part of high culture, Scott appraises

the lower class Indians' habit of drinking cheap distilled liquor. Hari Kumar drinks hooch to make him a good Indian and says:

Drinking cheap liquor in an airless room in a house in a back street on our own side of the river. And Vidyasagar laughing and telling the others that soon I would become a good Indian because the liquor was bootleg and we drank it at Government expense. (*The Jewel in the Crown* p.181)

Having been denied the white identity in India, Hari Kumar drinks cheap liquor to become an indigenous. Following the rape of Daphne Manners, five Hindu boys were arrested “who were drinking hooch in a hut on the other side of the river” (*The Jewel in the Crown* p.287). Notwithstanding all the youths were innocent of everything “except drinking hooch”, District police superintendent, Roland Merrick, arrested them on the charge of rape and later chargedsheeted them as political prisoners. Another kind of cheap smoking prevailing in India is *bidi*. Hari Kumar smokes *bidi* and is given to the other kinds of indigenous addiction, which Daphne Manners describes as “Indian cigarette” which make him feel more Indian. The English girl, Daphne Manners smokes it but expresses her utmost disliking for it as she relates her experience that “it is a cheap Indian cigarettes...but smelly and cumulatively unpleasant. I tried one but hated it, so we ended up smoking our own” (*The Jewel in the Crown* p.268). Scott reports that the servants or the people of lowest strata of Indian society smoke *bidi* at their leisure time. Sister Ludhmilla’s unnamed lower class bodyguard, who escorts her from bank to Sanctuary, smokes *bidi* outside the bank (*The Jewel in the Crown* p.85). While passing through Mayapore bazaar, Hari Kumar comes across “a sweating, half-naked coolie sat on top of the sacks smoking a *bidi*” (*The Jewel in the Crown* p.159). However, the British express their utmost disgust for addictions of the East and consider it to be primitive and unhygienic.

Kipling demonstrates his understanding of the Orient through his close observation of the caste-based Oriental society. By discussing the Oriental foods, religions and cultural traditions and the unique Oriental hospitality, Forster displays a better understanding of Orient and Indo-Islamic culture. Kipling, Foster and Scott nonetheless have shown their familiarity with the Orient. At times, they are accurate in their account of India/ Indians and other Oriental aspects. But their representation, more often than not, appears to be biased, prejudiced, distorted and the reinforcement of the Oriental stereotypes. Their works display an interplay of a cross-cultural understanding marred at times by the lack of accuracy.

### Works Cited

- [1] Abbasi, Faiza, and Sujan Mondal, eds. *Bridging the Divide: Essays on Language, Literature and Islamic Studies*. New Delhi: Viva, 2017. Print.
- [2] Barthes, Roland. “Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption”. In *Food and Culture*, edited by Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik. New York: Routledge. Print.
- [3] Chambers, Claire and Caroline Herbert. *Imagining Muslims in South Asia and Diaspore: Secularism, Religion, and Representation*. London: Routledge, 2015. Print.
- [4] Forster, E. M. *A Passage to India*. Ed. Pankaj Mishra. London: Penguin, 2005. Print.
- [5] --- . *A Passage to India*. Ed. Stallybrass, Oliver. London: Penguin, 1979. Print.
- [6] Furbank, P. N. *E M Forster: A Life*. London: Oxford UP. 1978. Print.
- [7] Galgut, Damon. *The Arctic Summer*. Delhi: Atlantic. 2014. Print.

- [8] Kassab, Robin Yassin. *The Road from Damascus*. London: Penguin Books, 2008. Print.
- [9] Kipling, Rudyard. Trivedi, Harish (ed.). *Kim*. UK: Penguin, 2001. Print..
- [10] Le, Wenxin. Rev. of *Eating Identities: Reading Food in Asian American Literature* Crime by  
 a. Wenying Xu, Punishment and Redemption. *MELUS*, 35.3 (Fall 2010): 231-233. Jstor.
- [11] Perry, Catherine. "Migrant Muslim Writers Challenging Western Perceptions". *Religion and  
 a. Literature* .40.1(Spring 2011):122-126. Jstor.
- [12] Sardar, Ziauddin and Meryll Wyn Davies. *American Terminator: Myths, Movies, and Global  
 a. Power*.USA: Disinformation, 2004. Print.
- [13] Scott, Paul. *The Jewel in the Crown*. New York: William Morrow and Company Inc.,  
 a. 1978. Print.
- [14] ...*The Days of the Scorpion*. New York: William Morrow and Company Inc, 1978. Print.
- [15] ...*The Towers of Silence*. New York: William Morrow and Company Inc, 1978. Print
- [16] ... *A Division of the Spoils*. New York: William Morrow and Company Inc, 1978. Print.
- [17] Stajcic, Nevana. "Understanding Culture: Food as a Means of Communication".  
 a. *Hemispheres. Studies on Cultures and Societies*: 28, 77-87. 2013.
- [18] Suleri, Sara. *The Rhetoric of English India*. London: U of Chicago, 2013. Print.