

Exploration of the Cultural Aspects of Hindi Food Expressions Concerning Hindi Foreign Language Education

Paper Submission: 00/00/2020, Date of Acceptance: 00/00/2020, Date of Publication: 00/00/2020

Food is rooted in human evolution. The form of food and the communication system both have been ever-evolving parallel with society and culture. Thus food and communication are near related to social customs and cultural practices. Due to the growing interest in gastronomy globally, food is now considered a significant source for exploring a geographical area's cultural characteristics. Like other civilizations and cultures, food and culture in India go hand in hand, which we can see in expressions of diverse Indian languages. Hindi, though a modern Indian language, however, is deeply rooted in the cultural past. Therefore, the tradition of cultural perception and social practice is active as a background of Hindi expressions. In this study, I have tried to explore Hindi food expressions' cultural aspects essential in making meaning. I have also tried to explain that, historically, how food and communication are related to each other. Without knowing the cultural message, it isn't easy to receive the meaning of an expression in totality. I believe this study will be useful for Hindi foreign language education.

Keywords: Hindi Foreign Language Education, Food Culture, Hindi Food Expressions, Food and Communication, *Etc.*

Introduction

Under the influence of globalization, intercultural interaction, and growing interest in food culture studies, several books and research papers have been published on India's food culture. However, possibly, no study related to food and the Hindi language has been done yet. To my knowledge, this is the first attempt to study the cultural aspects of Hindi food expressions. If so, it would be my duty to explain what was the immediate motivation behind doing so. Food politics has always been in India's news, but on account of the ongoing farmer's protest, food and agriculture have been the most debated topics in Indian politics, media, and society. Economists, agricultural scientists, food experts, and social scientists have interpreted diverse food aspects according to their subjects' scope. During the last few months, words like *annadata* have been used repeatedly in Hindi media; I felt that there should be a study on Hindi food expressions' cultural aspects. This research is the result of that.

I have identified culturally-rooted Hindi food expressions and categorized them into five categories - cultural concept of food, the essentiality of food, the cultural context of food disciplines, food in religion and rituals, and social power and perception. I have adopted a qualitative research method and explored Hindi food expressions' cultural aspects based on my observations and related references.

Aim of the Study

The aim of the study is to highlight the socio-cultural context of food expressions in Hindi.

Literature review

The centrality of the cultural context in foreign language education has always been at the core. Although a fair amount of research (Byram 1989; Byrnes, 2002; Kramsch 1993, 1997, 1998, 2012, 2014; Lange & Paige 2003; Risager 2006) done to explore the role of culture in foreign language education, culture still is the most discussed aspect of foreign language education. Claire Kramsch (2012) has provided a broad theoretical basis for establishing the culture's significance in foreign language education. She believes: "*culture in language study has to be*



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seen as a way of making meaning that is relational, historical, and that is always mediated by language and other symbolic systems." (p 71)

Dictionaries are widely used in foreign language education and translation studies to negotiate with meaning. Dictionaries can provide meanings of a word or term but not the sociocultural context in perspective that holds an expression's intent. That is why a foreign language learner struggles to draw the culturally correct meaning of a term. The same challenge is also for the translation studies where culture plays a crucial role in translating a texts' message. Therefore, to earn proficiency in a target culture's language, learners and translators need to know the factors responsible for constructing meaning, the process of meaning-making, and the dimensions of different shades of meaning according to the context. It is the language through which a set of values, attitudes, and beliefs are expressed. The process of meaning-making heavily depends upon sociocultural context. Scholars (Allwright & Baily 1991; Brooks 1968; Emmitt & Pollock 1997; Hannerz 1992; Hudson 1980; Spillman 2002; Spiro 1987; Strauss & Quinn 1997; Taylor 1958) have long been deliberating how meaning and culture are associated. Now there is little doubt about the fact that meaning is bound in the sociocultural context.

The perception, attitudes, beliefs, practices about food, food production, and food consumption form society's food culture. Food culture is nearly related to ethnicity and cultural heritage that shapes food concepts incorporating values. Along with its formation, food culture develops communication mechanisms that we see in various family and outside interactions. All this takes place under a societal process that includes politics, economics, religion, and value creation. Thus, food culture is a part of the larger cultural landscape that tells us people's way of life and their perspectives on life. Precisely, food has always been a sub-discipline in anthropology. Still, the importance of food culture and food ethnography has increased in terms of intercultural interaction during the age of globalization. In the Indian context, the elements with which food culture is made include cast, class, family and religious group identity. More importantly, there is also the political angle of food culture in contemporary India which can be seen as nationalist and secular food discourse.

Disappointingly, food culture is absent from academic discussion in India. However, the widespread presence of Indian food culture in the virtual world has given a new dimension to the related investigations (Bhuyan 2010; Olivelle 1999; Ray & Srinivas 2012; Srinivas 2006).

Due to the cultural diversity and plurality of Indian culture, it becomes a little more challenging to know the cultural context of Hindi expressions. Thus studies to reveal the cultural aspect of Hindi expressions on diverse themes are the most sought area of Hindi foreign language education. For example, a foreign language learner or a non-native translator may not comprehend the meaning of कच्चा खाना (kaccha khana) and पक्का खाना (pakka khana)

without knowing the sociocultural background of the term. Thus, this paper intends to contribute by exploring sociocultural factors in making meaning of Hindi food expressions.

Food and its Relation to the Evolution of Communication and Culture

Since antiquity, humans, like all other creatures, have negotiated with nature to survive. It was not only for protecting themselves from the negative impact of the environment but mainly with the pressing obligation to eat for survival and saving themselves from the threat of being eaten. This process of negotiation continued for a long time until man discovered fire. The discovery of fire was a significant breakthrough that leveraged humans to exploit, influence and control nature. The discovery of fire and the beginning of cooking is an indicator of the transition from nature to culture in human life. It was such a decisive transformation that heralded a new era in human life. Since then, food has become so associated with human life development that it changed and developed continuously while influencing socio-cultural life. Thus, food reveals and reflects the uniqueness and identity of cultures across the world.

Food had an essential role in the development of the earliest forms of human communication. According to social anthropologist Anderson (2005), with the development of the human brain, social groups grew in strength from a small cluster of around 20 members during the Homo erectus era to 50-150 members during the period of Homo Sapiens, also increasing the territory controlled. The need to share information on the food source and its distribution among the group members might have stimulated communication evolution. Anderson believes this is one of the ways how language developed. Anthropologists have hypothesized that the emergence of communication was the need for territorial control tied to food. Language or communication was necessary to express the desire to maintain social ties, reduce tension with food division, and share food while sitting around the fire face-to-face, laughing, exchanging feelings, and conversing. The human race overcame the natural instinct of tension and overturned the sign of danger (baring of teeth in the case of animals), and transformed them into the very essence of conviviality, hence moving towards socio-cultural development. Anthropologists believe that today's dining table culture's originating source in which we interact and talk with the community members is the same ancient practice of mixing food and talk that continued in contemporary form, crossing various socio-cultural development stages. In the course of cultural development, it is evident that socio-economic power and religious beliefs may have influenced food-related expressions that we see in the historical study of culture. (The Cultural Dimension of Food: 6,7).

The cultural Concept of Food and Hindi Food Expressions

It is not that with the development of language and culture, it has become easier for humans to decide what to eat and what not to.

Different societies have different concepts about what constitutes food. In some cultures, grasshoppers, termites, frogs, snakes, bees, scorpions, bats are eaten fondly, while in some other cultures, it is looked on with disgust. The concept to distinguish between edible and inedible food is always culturally dictated and reflects the cultural view of classifying the world. Mary Douglas (1979) illustrates this in terms of philosophical anthropology, "the body social determines the way in which the physical body is perceived".the physical experience of the body, which is always conditioned by the social categories through which it is manifest, provides support for a particular view of society: there is a continuous exchange of meanings between the two types of corporal experience, and each reinforces the categories of the other." (The Cultural Dimension of Food: p8).

Therefore, what we consider edible or inedible is not just a food preference or choice but reflects cultural meaning. This classification is significant from the cultural point of view because it gives rise to the sanctity of life and purity and pollution and reinforcement to social power.

Food in Hinduism is considered a gift from God. Food's role is not only to satisfy hunger; it is linked to the holistic health of life and has a role in achieving life's objectives because it is directly related to the body, mind and soul. The concept of *आहार-विहार* (*ahar-vihar*), a holistic combination of food, work and sleep, tells the cultural perception about the food and our life. *The Gita* (6:17) underlines the importance of *आहार-विहार* in the following words:

"The 'yoga which destroys all sorrows,' i.e., *unties bondages, is successfully practiced by him who is temperate in eating and recreation, temperate in exertion, and temperate in sleep and vigil.*"

The term *आहार-विहार* expresses the above thought of the *Geeta*. The very message is conveyed through this expression – *आहार-विहार ठीक रखिए, सब ठीक रहेगा* (*ahar-vihar thik rakhiye, sab thik rahega* - everything will be fine if the right diet and balanced lifestyle are followed). The words *पथ्य* (*pathya*) and *अपथ्य* (*apathya*) are classifications of *आहार-विहार*, manifesting the concept of Ayurveda. Foods that affect the body and mind positively and bring the desired result for health are called *पथ्य*, and those which affect adversely are known as *अपथ्य*. That is why it is said *रोगी के लिए दवाई के साथ पथ्यापथ्य का पालन आवश्यक है* (*rogi ke liye dawai ke sath pathyapathy ka palan avashyak hai* - A patient needs to follow the *pathyapathy* with medicine).

Words such as *खाद्य* (*khadya* - edible, lawful) – *अखाद्य* (*akhadya* - inedible, unlawful), *खाद्यान्न* (*khaadyanna*, food), *भोज्य* (*bhojya* -eatable) *अभोज्य* (*abhojya* -

uneatable), and *भक्ष्य* (*bhakshya* – edible) *अभक्ष्य* (*abhakshya* - inedible) tend to limit the concept of food reinforcing the cultural continuity of the perception of the physical body and body social. Hindu scriptures avoid foods that are believed to hamper the development of the body or mental abilities. *भक्ष्य* (*bhakshya*) and *अभक्ष्य* (*abhakshya*) if combined, refers to the sense of what to eat and what not – *भक्ष्याभक्ष्य* (*bhakshyabhakshya*). In Hindi, the word *भक्षक* (*bhakshak*) refers to one who has voracious appetites (*पेटू*), without considering *भक्ष्याभक्ष्य*, thus, not used in a positive sense as indicated by this expression – *जब रक्षक ही भक्षक बन जाए तो क्या किया जाए!* (*jab rakshak hi bhakshak ban jaye to kya kiya jaye* - What to do when the keeper becomes the eater!)

खाद्य (*khadya* - lawful foods) are those endorsed by the scriptures, and *अखाद्य* (*akhadya* - unlawful) are those which are prohibited. However, dietary restrictions and attitudes vary among ethnic groups and regions. Culturally, the perception about *मांसाहार* (*mansahar* - non-vegetarian food) and *मदिरा पान* (*madira pan* - consuming alcohol) is not good because it is a religious belief that non-veg food and consumption of alcohol leads to devil instinct (*आसुरी प्रवृत्ति*). Despite being culturally discouraged, *मांसाहार* is accepted as one of the edible food. However, the concept of *मांसाहार* does not include beef-eating since cows are declared *aghanya* (not to be killed) by Vedas. Mutton (*मांस mans*) may be a food (*आहार ahar*) but saying *गोमांसाहार* (*gomansahar*) to refer beef eating will be a blunder from the cultural point of view. *गोमांस* (*gomans*) is combined with *भक्षण* (*bhakshan*)

as *गोमांसभक्षण* (*gomansbhakshan*), *गोमांसभक्षी* (*goman s bhakshi*). Similarly, monsters or animals that eat man are called *नरभक्षी* (*narbhkshi* – cannibal; *आदमखोर adamkhor* in Persian). Combining *मांस mans* with *आहार* (*ahar*) and *भक्षण* (*bhakshan*) reflect cultural perception behind it. When the term *मांसभक्षण* (*mansbhakshan*) is used to refer non-vegetarian food, it reflects disapproval to it.

शाकाहार (vegetarian food) has been one of the well-known traits of Indian culture. In Hinduism, all living beings are sacred, being a part of God and should not be killed. According to the notion of rebirth, the soul can be born in any form. *Vedic Samhitas* and Hindu scriptures have played a significant role in forming Hindu beliefs. It seems that the cultural perception of the importance of vegetarianism is mainly due to the Vedic view, which says, "You must

not use your God-given body for killing God's creatures, whether they are human, animal or whatever" (Yajurveda, 12-32). This cultural debate on non-vegetarian (सामिष - samish) versus vegetarian (निरामिष-niramish) food is the oldest one.

Nonetheless, the word सामिष that means meat (prey) or food, or an object of enjoyment reveals much through its meaning.

It is often mentioned that India's food culture is not homogenous and food preferences and practices differ among cast, class, regional and religious groups. Yet, people feel that India is a vegetarian nation. In contrast, the truth is that about eighty per cent of Indians like non-vegetarian food. Despite being in minority, vegetarianism is a dominant discourse of Indian politics. The socio-cultural background may shed some light on this. We have discussed above the Vedic view, which has a vital role in making religious perception in Indian. But the vegetarianism discourse of modern India is mostly influenced by Gandhi. Gandhi was a devout Hindu, having unwavering faith in Hindutva philosophy and non-violence. Gandhi's influence on the people of India included his religious views. Gandhi was a Vaishya in terms of the Varna-system. Even today, the Vaishya community is the largest vegetarian community and the follower of Hindutva. Traditionally, being a trader community, the Vaishya community has been financially strong and a pioneer in managing Hindu religious matters. That is to say, despite being low in number, vegetarianism has become a part of Hindu identity and nationalist politics. There is another angle of vegetarianism politics of 20th century India. In the nineteenth century, Swami Dayananda, the founder of Aryasamaj (1885), revived Hindutva, giving a call of "Back to Vedas" and opposed social evils, including animal sacrifices and eating non-vegetarian food. Aryasamaj became very popular in north-west India. Incidentally, both Dayanand and Gandhi were Gujaratis. Later, in the twenty-first century, Gujarat's influence in India's national politics and the emergence of vegetarianism as a part of nationalist politics has become a significant trend. There are abundant expressions in Hindi on vegetarianism. The one is enough to understand the power of vegetarian discourse – मूक जीव की पीड़ा समझो, अपनाएँ शाकाहार (muuk jeev ki pida samjho, khaao shakahar - understand the agony of a silent creature and adopt vegetarianism)

The classification of सात्त्विक भोजन *satwik bhojan* (nourishing food which purifies the mind and provides health, happiness and strength), राजसी भोजन *rajasi bhojan* (oily, spicy and rich in taste but does not purify mind), and तामसिक भोजन *tamasik bhojan* (usually non-veg food) represent the concept of social categories of *Gunas* or qualities (सत् *sat*, रजस् *rajas*, and तमस् *tamas* respectively) which is the prime factor of the classification of the society in the form of *Varna*.

It was believed that pure food results in the purity of one's conduct and his thought. *Chandogyia Upanishad* (7-26-2) opined that "when one's food is pure; one's being becomes pure." The Hindi proverb जैसा खाए अन्न, वैसा होवे मन (*jaisa khaye anna, vaisa howe man*) looks like the translation of the above view of the *Chandogyia Upanishad*. It reinforces the concept of edible-inedible, highlighting the effect of food on the mind. Whereas जहाँ भाव नहीं वहाँ भोजन नहीं (*jahan bhav nahin, vahan bhojan nahin* - one should not accept food if not offered out of love, warmth, and friendliness. The connotation is that food served with affection and warmth should be accepted without considering one's social status. It was the emotion and love of *Shabari*, a lower caste devotee woman due to which Lord Rama ate her half-eaten plums.

The Cultural Importance of the Essentiality of Food for Life and its Expressions in Hindi

From the cultural perspective, the importance of food, as mentioned in the *Taittiriya Upanishad* (7-1), is unique - "अन्नं वै प्राणा... *Thou shall not blame food, for that is thy commandment unto labour. Verily Prana also is food, and the body is the eater. The body is established upon Prana, and Prana is established upon the body. Therefore food here is established upon food. He who knoweth this food that is established upon food, getteth his firm base, he becometh the master of food and its eater, great in progeny, great in cattle, great in the radiance of holiness, great in glory.*"

It would be fair to say that the Hindi expression अन्न देवता (*anna devta*) reveals the cultural values and tradition related to the importance of food as our body's existence depends on it. अन्न देवता expresses Hindu belief according to which the person who disrespects food or does not eat food as per rules prescribed by scriptures, angers the food deity. If a person enjoys food and adheres to the ethics of consuming food, he gets health and prosperity in life. Before serving food, one should pay obeisance to the food god on a serving plate and thank him for his attainment. If a grain of food falls on the ground while eating, it should not be thrown in the dustbin but should be carefully kept near the burrow of ants or rats. According to the scriptures, any liquid or solid object from which one receives life is considered as God; of which अन्न (*anna*, food) is the best because a person can be given life from it. Therefore, since अन्न is tied to our existence, the phrase अन्न जल उठना (*anna jal uthna*) denotes no means of sustenance and finally, end of life. दाना-पानी उठना (*dana-pani uthna*) is also a similar expression. The Hindi terms - दाने-दाने को तरसना (*dane-dane ko tarasana*) or दाने-दाने को मुहताज होना (*dane-dane komuhtaj hona*-to be in dire want of sustenance or food) which refer to one's poor situation, express the essentiality of food.

In the ongoing context of farmer's protest in India, many times, we have heard the buzz word अन्नदाता (*annadata*) referred to the farmers, which means one who gives us life by providing food. Some believe अन्नदाता refers to three entities involved in the process of making food as a final product – the one who grows the food, the second one who brings food as a raw material to us and the third one who prepares food for us. The benediction अन्नदाता सुखी भव! (*annadata sukhi bhava!*) Includes well-being of all the above concerned. But the popularity of the word अन्नदाता is mainly due to its cultural root, in *Chanakya Niti* (4-19) that counts five types of fathers in one's life whose contributions are significant for us; the "अन्नदाता" is one of them.

Practically, food is the first and foremost requirement for living life. The proverb, पहले पेट-पूजा, फिर काम दूजा (*pahale pet-puja, fir kam duja* - food first and then work) and भूखे भजन न होही गोपाला (*bhukhe bhajn na hohin gopala* - a starving devotee won't be able to pray) perfectly speak the essentiality of food.

Cultural Perception of Food Discipline and its' Reflection in Hindi Food Expressions

Both essentialities of food and food discipline are not in conflict with each other.

It is vital to maintain discipline and bring moderation in enjoying food. In Indian culture, interestingly, along with the necessity of पेट-पूजा (*pet-puja*), the importance of observing आहारचर्या (*aharacharya* - diet discipline) and निराहार (*nirahara* - abstaining from food) is also equally given importance. निराहार is a *Sadhna* or discipline for attaining detachment from worldly things. The Gita (2:59) tells that "If one abstains from food, the object of sense ceases to affect..." Similar expressions in Hindi are the two most popular words – व्रत (*vrata*) and उपवास (*upvasa*). व्रत that means pledge is observed to attain sublimation of mind. One may keep व्रत with or without food. In उपवास, no food is taken. It is for both physical and mental purification. However, nowadays, व्रत and उपवास are interchangeably used and have become a ritual purely. Yet, निराहार, व्रत and उपवास may not be equated with अभोजन (*abhojan* or खाली पेट *khali peta* - no food intake), which is in Ayurveda, identified as one of the factors causing gastric.

Normally, three types of आहारचर्या (*aharacharya* - diet discipline) according to one's preference are followed – अल्पाहार (*alpathar* - light meal, abstemiousness), मितहार (*mitahara* - moderate diet), and फलाहार (*falahara* - living on fruit). The first two are mainly adopted for health, while the last one is related to faith. Specifically, the term आहारचर्या is used in the context of strict food discipline observed as part of religious practice by the Jain saints in *Chaturmas*, a

period of four months of rainy season. The word ऋतुचर्या (*ritucharya*) is a season-specific food discipline

recommended by Ayurveda. Ayurveda believes that seasons have a deep connection with human health. Therefore, different types of food and routine are mentioned in Ayurveda for each of the seasons. In this context, it would be pertinent to mention three more concepts that relate to food ethics. According to a legend, *Charak*, one of the proponents of Ayurveda, asked saint *Vagbhatta*, "Who is healthy?" *Vagbhatta* answered "हितभुक् (*hitbhuk* - the one who eats according to the nature of his body), मितभुक् (*mitbhuk* - the one who eats moderate diet), and ऋतभुक् (*ritbhuk* - the one who eats honestly earned food)". It is not very difficult to find the imprint of the above three on these expressions - "आपरूप भोजन, पर रूप श्रृंगार" (*aaprup bhojan pararup shringar*); "जो कम खाए वो क्यों पछताए" (*jo kam khaye, vo kyon pachtaye*); and "काली कमाई दवाई में गँवाई" (*kali kamaai davai men ganvai*).

Hindi Food Expressions Regarding Religion and Rituals

Food is inevitably related to the religious practices, rituals, and celebrations, among all cultures. The centrality of Food to Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism are unique. We have discussed the word अन्नदेवता (*annadevta*) above; here, I am going to talk about अन्नपूर्णा (*annapurna*). The dictionary meaning of अन्नपूर्णा is the one who fulfills the need for food and gives strength. अन्नपूर्णा is the deity of अन्न(anna -food) who is also known as अन्नदा (*annada*). अन्नपूर्णा is considered a form of deity Durga (goddess of power, might, and protection) who nourishes the whole world. Due to the importance of the deity, there are several religious references found in Hinduism associating अन्नपूर्णा माता (*Annapurna Mata*). The very cultural background is behind naming the अन्नपूर्णा योजना (*annapurna yojana* - a scheme of providing food security to the needy) of the Central and State Governments in India. The festival, अन्नकूट पूजा (*annakut puja*- worshiping mountain of food) celebrated a day after Diwali also highlights the importance of food in our life though in religious metaphor.

The popularity of the most commonly used word प्रसाद (प्रसाद-अर्पण *prasad-arpan*, प्रसाद अर्पित करना, *prasad arpit karna*, प्रसाद चढ़ाना *prasad chadhana* - offering holy Food to God; प्रसाद ग्रहण करना/लेना *Prasad grahan karna/lena* - taking remains of offered sacred food) in Hindi underlines the centrality of food in Hinduism. In India, religious rituals invariably involve offering food to God because food is considered a gift of God as it plays a significant role in

every living being's life. Hindus believe that God is the creator, preserver, and destroyer. The food virtually connects to the above triple functions. Hindu scriptures suggest that all food should be offered as a sacrifice to God before it is eaten, since the remains of the offered food (प्रसाद) purify body, mind, and spirit. Thus, not accepting प्रसाद is considered disregard to God. [clarification - in the context of the Constitution of India, the meaning of the word 'प्रसाद' is not related to food as reflected in this expression – "राष्ट्रपति के प्रसाद-पर्यंत" ("rashtraapati ke Prasad paryant - over the pleasure of the President")] Offering holy food is also known as भोग लगाना (*bhog lagana* - to feed sacred food to God) which is an essential ritual in Hindu temples. Once भोग is offered to God, the remains become प्रसाद for devotees. Thus, भोग and प्रसाद are closely associated. In this context, two Hindi expressions – भंडारा *bhandara*, and लंगर *langar* are very popular from a cultural perspective. On special occasions, especially during festivals, Hindu temples distribute holy food offered as a part of worship, to people regardless of their religious affiliation. This practice is called भंडारा in north India and आनन्दनम् *anandanam* in South India. An individual can organise भंडारा as part of the worship on any special occasions. Individually arranged भंडारा is very common in North-West India. लंगर, a Persian word meaning alms (or holy gift), is related to the Sikh community and usually known as community kitchen in Sikh Gurudwara. The proponent of Sikhism, Guru Nanak Dev, in his teachings made it famous that all are equal; hence they must eat sitting together. Later, it was made an essential part of the religious activities at all Gurudwaras. It is necessary to mention that all activities relating to लंगर, including a donation for food, preparation of food, cooking and serving food, and cleaning of utensils are done as part of service to God.

The Vedic world view, which firmly believes in the coexistence of all living beings, recommends five Yajna (यज्ञ) or sacrifices one should perform daily. Bhuta-yajna (भूत यज्ञ) is one of them; according to which one should to feed living beings such as animals, birds, ants etc. as part of religious duty. Hindi expressions गो-ग्रास खिलाना (*go-gras khilana* - feeding food to cows) and दाना डालना (*dana dalna* - putting grains for birds and ants) are directly related to *Bhuta-yajna*. Devout Hindus in cities perform this ritual even today.

भोज *bhoj* (भोज करना *bhoj karana*, भोज-भात खिलाना *bhoj-bhaat khilana*) in Hindi is a feast or banquet that is usually organised on religious occasions and social events such as wedding, celebrating the birth of a newborn, etc. The Hindu calendar has at least eighteen feast occasions,

including the festival Holi, Ramnavami, Janmashtami, Dussehra, Pongal, Diwali etc., when food is shared with the poor and needy because distributing food to have-nots is considered good *Karma*. However, ब्रह्मभोज *brahmbhoj* is a ritual performed on the thirteenth and concluding day of the last rites of a deceased. It is also called तेरहवीं *terahvin*, which begins with offering ceremonial food to Brahmins (ब्राह्मण-भोज *brahman-bhoj*) to satisfy the desires of the departed soul. The use of the word ब्रह्मभोज is related to the last rites only, while ब्राह्मण-भोज can be performed on other occasions too due to the traditional belief of the sacred status of Brahmins in Hindu social hierarchy. ब्राह्मण-भोज is an essential ritual for devout Hindus that they perform during the dark fortnight of the Hindu month *Bhadrapada* (पितृ पक्ष/श्राद्ध *pitripaksha/shraddha*) in honor of deceased ancestors. Similarly, कन्या-भोज (*kanya bhoj*) is a ritual performed on the eighth and ninth day of *Navratra* or *Durga Puja* in which ceremonial food to nine unmarried girls aged between two to ten is offered representing the nine forms of Goddess *Durga*. दरिद्र-भोज (*daridra-bhoj* – feeding poor), however, is not a widespread social practice, but nowadays it has become popular in big cities as part of good *Karma*. Some people prefer to celebrate their birthdays by feeding poor than celebrating it in a restaurant. During the lockdown, people in big cities distributed food to the impoverished migrant laborer. It is believed that feeding the poor or starved is a kind of good *Karma* which leads to the attainment of पुण्य (*punya* – virtue).

This religious sentiment expressed in Hindi as भूखे को अन्न प्यासे को पानी (*bhukhe ko anna pyase ko pani* – feeding starved and thirsty). Reformists and intellectuals of the nineteenth-twentieth century popularized that in the Kali-yuga, God appears as a दरिद्र (*daridra* - pauper), that is why he is also known as दरिद्र नारायण (*daridra Narayan*). The service of the poor and the service of Narayana (Vishnu) are both equal. The seeds of this belief exist in the Puranas and Bhakti-kavya (a stream of devotional poetry). Since the word दरिद्र sounds derogatory, feeding poor is often done in the name of नारायण-सेवा (*Narayan-seva*) that includes multiple welfare activities.

Religious and cultural festivals related to अन्न (*anna*) or खाद्यान्न (*khaadyanna*) confirm that food is still a central element of social life in India. Celebrating खरीफ़ (*kharif* – autumn harvest) and रबी (*rabi* – spring harvest) harvest under different names has been a pan Indian phenomenon. The autumn harvest festival नवान्न (नव+अन्न *navanna*; *Nabanna* in Bangla) and the spring festival बैसाखी/वैशाखी (*baisakhi* or *vaishakhi*) are marker of prosperity in life. Prosperity includes both health and wealth. A

balanced diet for good health is made of consisting both autumn and spring harvests. Since the economy was based on agriculture, surplus production could be converted into currency. Thus, what was धान्य (*dhanya* - agricultural produce or food) was also धन (*dhan* - wealth). Hence, people wished for abundance of धन and धान्य. The above cultural perception and practice could have been a factor in the formation of this famous benediction - प्रभु आपको धन-धान्य से संपन्न करे! (*prabhu apko dhan-dhanya se sampan kare!* May God bless you with wealth and prosperity!)

Social Power, Practice and Perception in Hindi Food Expressions

Hindi food expressions are closely connected with social power, practice and perception. Some expressions have specific relationships with gender.

The term रोटी-पानी करना (*roti-pani karana* - cooking and doing other kitchen-work) is considered to be a responsibility to be performed by women only. Working in the office does not give her concession to be absent from her household responsibilities. That is why working women in India are said to have been doubly burdened. रोटी-पानी करना *roti-pani karana*, रसोई-पानी करना *rasoi-pani karna*, and चौका-बरतन करना *chauka-bartan karana* are similar expressions .

Although things have changed a lot, however, since the above terms have been categorised as a feminine activity, colloquially, it may be sarcasm if used for a man. According to the separation of responsibilities, a woman should remain at home and look after the household chores. Contrary to the above, the expression रोटी-कपड़ा का इतिजाम करना (*roti-kapda ka intizam karna* - to subsist dependents) is considered a responsibility to be discharged by men. Thus, according to the Hindu Marriage Act, the court asks a husband to pay alimony to his wife at the time of divorce. The husband cannot refuse even if he is unemployed. But, the same expression would mean providing subsistence to the poor when used in a political context. For example, "गरीबों के लिए रोटी, कपड़ा, और मकान का इतिजाम करना सरकार की जिम्मेदारी है" *gareebon ke lie rotee, kapada, aur makaan ka intizaam karana sarakaar kee jimmedaaree hai* - It is the responsibility of the government to provide sustenance and shelter to the poor people).

रोज़ी-रोटी *roji-roti* refers to livelihood, and it is a cultural perception harming one's livelihood is considered like a sin - किसी की रोज़ी-रोटी पर लात मारना पाप है (*kisi ki roji-roti par lat marna pap hai* - taking the bread out of one's mouth is a sin). The other way, it is expressed किसी की रोज़ी-रोटी को नुक़सान पहुँचाना पाप है *kisi ki roji-roti ko nuksan pahunchan pap hai*. or किसी के पेट पर लात मारना पाप है *kisi ke pet par lat marna papa hai*.

The term दाल-रोटी *dal-roti* refers to subsistence or livelihood. Still, in an entirely different context, e.g., when asked, how your business is doing (काम-धंधा कैसा चल रहा है? *kam-dhandha kaisa chal raha hai?*), people often answer बस, दाल-रोटी चल रही है (*bas, dal-roti chal rahi hai* -Well, it just provides subsistence to us). It is a polite way to convey that everything goes well with my business.

Caste-relations are also reflected in Hindi food expressions. When society is divided into hierarchical castes, how can food be different in those ways? The term रोटी-बेटी का संबंध *roti-beti ka sambandh* is deeply related to the core features of the caste system. रोटी का संबंध होना *roti ka sanbandh hona* tells that sharing food with a social group is not restricted. In contrast, बेटी का संबंध *beti ka sambandh* refers to the marriage relationship. There were no restrictions in sharing food among the four Varnas, whereas marriages were not frequent. Marriage (बेटी का संबंध) is solemnised within the caste or ethnic group, which has been one of the main features of the caste system known as endogamy. रोटी का संबंध न होना *roti ka sambandh na hona* (not sharing food) is linked to the concept of purity and pollution which reflects through another expression कच्चा खाना *kaccha khana* (food cooked in water such as rice, daal, vegetables etc.) and पक्का खाना *pakka khana* (food cooked in ghee without using water). A traditional Brahmin cannot accept food from lower castes as lower castes are branded impure in the caste system. However, he can take food but only a pakka food from savarna castes and kaccha food from his caste. The term जात-पाँत *jaat-paant* (classification of castes and sub-castes and discrimination based on that) is also culturally related to food culture. The word पाँत *paant* means row. Eating food sitting in the same row shows that there is no discrimination among them. In the past, upper-caste people did not sit and eat food in the same row as the lower castes. Thus, food had been a significant factor of caste discrimination that reflects in many ways. With the above reference, one can understand why upper cast politicians, usually during election campaigns, sit in a row (पाँत) and eat food with Dalits.

The term खान-पान *khan-paan* is a widely used expression related to food that refers to the food culture as a whole. It looks like a modern form of *ahar-vihar* but not limited to that only. It seems that cultural interaction with foreign cultures and complex social situations have expanded its scope and meaning. Thus, it gives a different sense according to the context in which it is used. In fact, खान-पान reveals the distinct culture of a social group, social class, region and religion. If you want to know about the social status through food culture of a family, then ask

– उनके घर का खान-पान कैसा है? *unke ghar ka khan-paan kaisa hai?* If you say that मेरा उनसे खान-पान नहीं है *mera unse khan-paan nahin hai* that would mean that there is no friendly exchange between the two families of you. If you want to refer that the quality of food that served and the arrangement was not good, you may say खान-पान की व्यवस्था अच्छी नहीं थी *khan-paan ki vyavastha achchi nahi thi*. Look at an example of its use in the limited sense of food – शादी में खान-पान पर कितना खर्च हुआ? (*shadi men khan-paan par kitna kharch hua?* - How much money was spent on food at the wedding?) Whereas, suggesting that खान-पान ठीक रखिए! (*khan-paan thik rakhiye*) Or खान-पान का ध्यान रखिए (*khan-paan ka dhyan rakhiye*) is similar as आहार-विहार ठीक रखिए! (*ahar-vihar thik rakhiye!*)

Conclusion

By exploring cultural aspects of Hindi food expressions, this study intends to convey the significance of the sociocultural context that is an essential factor in making meaning. The discussion in this paper indicates the implications of culture and advocates promoting further research on cultural aspects of Hindi expressions, especially with the objective to foster Hindi foreign language education. Indeed, the circumstances in which Hindi evolved and the social conditions through which it developed were quite complex. The cultural heritage of the past, the cultural interaction with external cultures, social division of Indian society, and modern socio-political consciousness - all these factors play significant role in making meaning of Hindi expressions. So, what a Hindi learner should do – study culture, Indian history, and development of Indian society before learning Hindi? I think, a learner has the advantage to encompass the vast cultural milieu embedded in Hindi expressions if Hindi foreign language education can become a partner in his/her efforts.

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