

Food, Memories, and Women's Identities: A Feminist Reading of Select Diasporic Indian Women's Food Blogs/Vlogs as Cultural Meta-Narratives

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Abstract

Food – its preparation and consumption – has been the subject of cultural discourses worldwide. Food is also connected to memory, as a link between the past and the present. With the growth of digital initiatives to store memories, stories about food have found place in food blogs/vlogs, which are not merely spaces to record recipes, but have increasingly transformed to narratives of location and identity. Against this backdrop, the present study delves into concerns related to the idea of home/ homelessness vis-à-vis cultural identity that finds expression in food blogs/vlogs by diasporic Indian women. Focusing on the act of storytelling that is juxtaposed with recipes, the study will examine how these blogs/vlogs provide a platform to the authors to use memory as a tool to bind together generations of women in sisterhood, cutting across time and space. The paper aims to read these food blogs/vlogs through the lens of feminism, gender roles, and Memory Studies as expressions of identity and resistance through culinary art, thereby, transforming the act of cooking from a silent feminine activity to a verbalized feminist act.

Keywords: Cooking; Diaspora; Identity; Memory; Recipes.

Introduction

A well-known feminist, Martha Rosler's six-minute video titled "Semiotics of the Kitchen", garnered a lot of interest as she critiques the commodified versions of gender stereotyped roles attributed to women in relation to the act of cooking and the kitchen space. Rosler's narrative challenges the widely accepted system of food production as a woman's work thrust

upon her by patriarchal hegemony, while bringing subjectivity to everyday kitchen meanings (Rosler, 1975). Julianna Bjorksten (2019), while making her observations on the language in Martha Rosler's video, highlights that "it is fitting that the apron comes first, not just because its initial letter begins the alphabet, but also because it is a visual signifier of the sexual division of labor – the homemaker's defining costume – signaling that feminine work is about to take place". She also notes that "Rosler's condescending presentation becomes a way to expose the language of food production as an oppressive, sexist force and to illuminate its alternate meaning of rage and violence". While Rosler mainly employs gestures to convey her intended rage, the act of cooking has been documented in various platforms as a verbalized and celebratory feminist act. Cookbooks, recipe books, cooking shows, etc. provide the much-required space to women to transform the act of cooking from a mere domestic chore to an act of self-fulfillment. However, contrary to this idea, early feminist scholars are seen to focus on "the kitchen as a site of women's oppression" (McLean, 2013, p. 6), and it is only in recent years that feminist scholarship has revalued women's relationship with food and the act of cooking as a source of self-empowerment.

Writing in 1997, Barbara Haber lamented that feminist food studies concentrated mostly on "eating disorders and the victimization of females," (Avakian, 1998, p. 68) and further stated that "[i]t will be a great relief to me when feminists ... can see food as a way in which women have historically sustained and celebrated life" (Avakian, 1998, pp. 68, 73). In this direction, the growth of food blogging/vlogging may be seen as a celebration of women's identity and the urge to store memories digitally before such memories succumb to the wrath of time. Interestingly, the act of cooking, which was limited only to the private sphere, has changed drastically in the blog/vlog space. Klara Seddon (2011) takes up this issue in the context of 'Bento Blogs' in Japanese culture and states that "[t]hrough such blogs, women interact with a network of like-minded women, attracting appreciation of their work outside of the family institution" (p. 3) and thereby, the food blog space allows "women (to) re-enact a private, domestic moment in a public setting" (p. 3). Being a part of the public domain, food blogs/vlogs have garnered interest in the act of cooking, transforming it into a fashionable and gratifying one. Similarly, the metaphor of the kitchen space from a closed-door affair, somewhere in 'the corner of the house' has changed to the modular open space entity, staking its claim as a feminist space.

The urge to store memories in connection with food is seen prominently

in the diasporic scenario. The acts of remembering and forgetting are intricately connected with each other. Paul Ricoeur (2006) in his exploration of *ars memoriae* (art of memory) observes that “a measured use of memorization also implies a measured use of forgetting” (p. 68) and elucidates the relationship between remembering, forgetting, and memory. Memory Studies as a discipline offers useful insights as a conceptual framework for analyzing remembrances of homeland in the diasporic scenario. This idea of homeland memory and its associated dimensions have attained significance in the context of food blogging/vlogging. The constant tug of war between the lost ‘home’ and the newfound land is a part and parcel of the diasporic sensibility. Food, being an important marker of identity, gets intertwined with the memories of the homeland. It is no surprise therefore, to find several diasporic food bloggers/vloggers engaged in storing the memories of food attached to the homeland in their blogs/vlogs. These blogs/vlogs, then, serve as hallmarks of identity of the bloggers/vloggers. An interesting aspect of these blogs/vlogs are the narratives that are juxtaposed with the ingredients and the recipes. These food stories of the past connect the women on one hand to the culture of their homeland, and on the other, bind them intricately to the shared sisterhood of generations of women in the family. Paula M. Salvio (2012) takes the idea of this shared memory to include the readers as well and opines that “food blogs also invite the reader to participate in the life of the blog – and the blogger – more readily than any related medium (cookbooks, food magazines, cooking shows) ever has” (p. 31). This study will dive deep into select food blogs/vlogs by Indian women settled in various parts of the world to examine how their blogs/vlogs use memory as a tool to preserve this shared culture and identity of their families and larger communities. These bloggers/vloggers claim that their objective is to cut across time and space to immortalize a tradition lest it is deleted from the memory of future generations.

Kitchen as a Political Site

Before going into a detailed examination of the food blogs/vlogs, it becomes imperative to look at the changing dynamics of the space where food is cooked and its relationship to women’s identity. The kitchen as a space is usually associated with women and their experiences. It is interesting to note the changing dynamics of the kitchen as an architectural entity as well as a space of gender identity. The idea of public and private spheres operating within the landscape of the household and the kitchen is crucial to the dynamics of power and gender (Bhambri, 2022). One of the most accessed and regulated spaces, a kitchen is clearly a political

site, which is gendered and classed. Women across the globe live certain experiences on this political site that largely lead to exclusivity in terms of both gender as well as architecture. Most often relegated as an inferior and marginalized space, it is controlled by the dictates of patriarchy. The marginalization, gross apathy and neglect of the kitchen mirrors the corresponding marginalization of women. Ambai's short story "A Kitchen in the Corner of the House" or the recent Malayalam language film "The Great Indian Kitchen" both deal with the central theme of isolation and nauseating neglect of the kitchen, thereby indicating the unequal gender positioning. Food, as emotions, are often associated with the disempowered and marginalized (Lupton, 1996). Therefore, it was with the kitchen site too – marginalized and voiceless.

Evolving through phases, the kitchen defined women and their unrecognized and unpaid labour. In the architectural journey, the path breaking Frankfurt model chose a closed and separate kitchen, while the Munich model of the kitchen was an extension of the living room. Closed or open, modular, or otherwise, the kitchens were designed by women, but were simultaneously designing women (Llewellyn, 2004). The dynamics of the kitchen connected with the sexual division of labour resulted in defining specific gender roles wherein masculine work came to be more valued than its feminine counterpart. The architectural evolution of the kitchen from the margins to the center of the homes is in a way a movement from the private to the public space. Though gradual and restricted to class exclusivity, the change is obvious. The kitchen is no longer restricted and hidden; rather it is a space that is invested in and gazed upon as a prominent part of the house worth displaying. Researchers like Angela Meah, through their work on gender and food, have looked at reclaiming the kitchen space to exercise agency and resistance. Feminism too with its varied lived experiences has moved on to a more nuanced understanding of the power dynamics and in that sense looks at the kitchen as a site of liberation rather than oppression (Deshwal and Thusoo, 2020).

The recalibrated perspective towards food and kitchen as means of liberation and fulfillment is evident with the emergence of women food bloggers and vloggers. They represent a new brand of feminism wherein the so-called mundane and routine tasks such as cooking and housekeeping are celebrated. Blogs and vlogs elevate domestic chores to self-fulfilling activities worthy of being documented and archived. Women seek to find joy and professional success in domestic work while connecting with a similar community of women online (Nathanson, 2021). Women can use the digital space to highlight aspects of mundane womanhood and

translate that into a thriving enterprise. Ree Drummond converted her food blog 'The Pioneer Woman' into a thriving multimedia corporation. She has successfully turned her humble narration of life on an Oklahoma ranch and the hearty food she cooks there into a Food Network TV show and collection of cookware sold at Walmart (Dejmanee, 2022). Anjali Pathak and Mallika Basu are both highly successful Indians who have carved a niche in the corporate landscape as food consultants and food entrepreneurs.

Inclusive Feminism

The evolving paradigm of feminism is today inclusive of choices that women make towards self-expression and self-worth in the so-called confined spaces of the traditional kitchen. Similarly, cooking and feeding eager family members, and nurturing are extensions of being a woman. Moving beyond the private space of the family or home and taking the leap of faith into the digital space, food blogs and vlogs help assert independence and create identity in a public domain. While blogs help create a personal brand on one hand, they also hold together memories of times gone by and keep alive a legacy. The inheritance is an individual treasure but more importantly connect women to generations of women before them who must have cooked and fed people so that the daughters could soar into newer horizons. The vlog 'The Traditional Life' with Valar and Ram celebrates a long forgotten nostalgic life amidst the serenity of a rustic landscape. The kitchen is central to the narrative wherein every single item is a recreation of a simple, traditional yet healthy life – pestle and mortar, brass utensils, a courtyard, a hearth. There is not a speck of plastic seen in the kitchen. Every frame of the video lingers achingly on to the tranquil surroundings – the dew drops, the chirping of birds, gushing of water in a nearby streamlet creating a visual treat. The roles are clearly gendered – the man working in the farms and the woman engaged in the household chores blissfully. Despite work being clearly bifurcated, there is a subtle and clear presence of a relationship based on respect and equality. For instance, Ram after eating, joyfully prepares hot appams for Valar who sits comfortably and eats as he prepares them for her. The progressive liberal approach is evident amidst the rusticity.

While celebration is an integral aspect of food blogging/vlogging, these are spaces for hardcore feminist ideological narratives too. As Nathman puts forth, in 'The Hemisphere: Foodies and Food Politics' that food is inherently a feminist topic what with women being told of its perfect preparation, or the *ideal weight* that depends on the right intake and so

on. Some bloggers specifically explore the domestic space and investigate gender norms that influence our relationship with food. These include Dr. Amie “Breeze” Harper’s blog ‘Sistah Vegan’ which looks at veganism from black feminist and critical race study perspectives. Similarly, ‘Fat Girl Food Squad’ is a blog community that follows inclusivity principle to support individuals to accept and be proud of their bodies. The blog addresses issues related to food, diet, plus size fashion and so on. Cooking and its celebration on public digital domains is about making an informed choice. The choice of an extended identity through nurturing and feeding not just others but oneself is certainly feminist as endorsed by Akanksha Mishra (2018) who says, “I cook because cooking aligns with my feminist politics of loving thyself, loving thy family and friends, and loving thy environment”.

Food and Followers

Apart from other incentives, the food blogs/vlogs also carry a glamour quotient creating desire. The intimate domestic details of the kitchen and tempting food arranged present glimpses of a cozy home – all of these catch the gaze of the viewers just as the male gaze. Often referred to as ‘food porn’, such glamorous digital space recognizes and appreciates the creative and technical skills of the woman behind the camera rather than the female body. Blogs and vlogs present the digital identities of women who can use the digital space to promote their expertise – and look delectable while doing so (Dejmanee, 2022). The monetization of a passionate hobby on one hand and holding forth with viewers who appreciate adds to the motivation of blogging. It is also about a healthy and youthful lifestyle that is shared and influenced through the network of digital sisterhood that the blogging community offers and hence, it has been rightly stated that “If food is such an intimate part of my emotional, physical and sexual nourishment, who can I trust the most to take this responsibility” (Mishra, 2018). ‘Mom-tastic’ by Shamsheera is a popular food vlog of Shamsheera, a Malayali homemaker in Dubai wherein the camera voyeuristically pans on into the private space of her home, festive feasts, or even mundane routines. Shamsheera’s ‘Mom-tastic’ is representative of several women who become ambassadors of popular brands of cookware, cutlery and other paraphernalia used inside the domestic spaces of homes in general and in kitchen specifically. The digital platforms and culinary activities become liberating on one hand and at the same time connect them to their roots, culture, and homeland on the other. In doing so, they create independent identities and become brands themselves.

The new media thus has changed the way kitchen spaces are experienced. The projection of the kitchen into a public domain through the space of technology makes it a mirror of the identities of women – women who are unapologetically feminine and feminist. Food preparation and related activities move into a celebratory space with informed choices rather than being perceived as mere drudgery. Along with sharing recipes, the aesthetics of kitchen make them sites of memory wherein every object displayed becomes narratives with distinct stories worth archiving. The woman inside the kitchen performs her role albeit gendered, to perfection connecting to readers and viewers of blog/vlogs, relishing in the new near celebrity identity and followers online. Along with the transformation of the kitchen, “women also get transformed; from passive consumers and oppressed labourers to active participants in a meaningful and constantly changing space” (Meah, 2016).

Memory, Home, and Identity

Storing memories of homeland culture and family tradition in terms of food is a significant aspect of food blogging/vlogging in the diasporic context. Feminist food scholars view food blogs/vlogs as digital food repositories and spaces for women to assert their identities. As Mohammed (2019) notes, online media provides an apt platform for the expression of marginalized voices and hence, blogs constitute a useful site for the analysis of the voice of the blogger as well as formation of solidarity of a group that is typically silenced by the structures and systems operating in society. Food blogs/vlogs are viewed as useful digital platforms which help place ethnic cuisines on global maps, thereby juxtaposing culinary experiences of the host countries with food memories of homeland. For the immigrant, sometimes leading the life of a vagabond, as Jayashree Mandal says after having stayed in three different continents and three countries, the food blog serves as “nostalgic memories associated with growing up years, especially around good food and family gatherings” (Mandal, ‘Spice and Curry’). Alamelu Vairavan of ‘Curry on Wheels’ fame, learnt cooking after marriage and migration, and blogs about Indian food, which records and validates her cultural identity. In this connection, we find that most of the diasporic food bloggers/ vloggers elaborate the urge to keep their native culture and tradition alive as the primary reason for the existence of the blog. Singapore-based Nagalakshmi Vishwanathan, who dedicates a section of her blog to ‘Kerala Recipes’, makes it a point to record her roots as “a Reddiar girl born in Nagercoil and brought up in Kottayam, Kerala” and how her cooking style “is a fantastic mix of Kerala food + South Tamil Nadu style cooking + a healthy mix of this and that thrown in” (Vish-

wanathan, 'Edible Garden'). It is noticed that successful bloggers make it a practice to elaborate the purpose of creating their blogs "in either the title, within the first few sentences of the first paragraph or through the use of heading" (Mete et al. 2019, p. 6) in order to gain the attention of the viewers. Sudeshna Banerjee in the 'About' section of her food blog, 'Cook Like a Bong: Master the Art of Bengali Cuisine' states "I created this blog to help people longing for Bengali food get started with, and eventually master the art of Bengali cuisine" (Banerjee, 'Cook Like a Bong'). Banerjee, who moved from Kolkata to Bangalore in 2007, and eventually to Austin, USA, records how she took up cooking as a serious initiative during her Bangalore days because of her longing for homemade and authentic Bengali food. She depended on her mother's telephonic tutorials and grandmother's recipes while she coursed through mastering the art of cooking. Other than her immediate family, she also relied on well-known Bengali women's food blogs, such as, 'Sutapa's Kitchen' and 'Bong Mom's Cookbook' to guide her through her cooking ventures. In the same spirit of passing on the tradition to others as well as for peer recognition, Banerjee offers the electronic copy of her book, *Saradiya Rannabati*, free to download in her blog. Klara Seddon (2012) in her analysis of Bento Blogs by Japanese women notes this urge in the bloggers to exhibit their bento on blogs to receive peer recognition, but more significantly to articulate "the private experience of caregiving and domestic management in a public domain" (p. 314). Banerjee's blog, similarly, provides a platform to bind women across spaces through her postings of interviews of other Bengali women food bloggers. This initiative is quite contrary to the usual competitiveness seen in businesses of similar nature and makes one realize that the purpose of food blogging, particularly in the diasporic setup, is more towards an establishment of identity and bonding rather than pecuniary interests alone.

Similar to Sudeshna Banerjee's initiative to keep alive the memory of the homeland through food blogging, is Sandeepa Datta Mukherjee's idea of starting her food blog, 'Bong Mom's Cookbook: A Bong, A Mom & A Cook.' An engineer by profession, Mukherjee, who lives in New Jersey, USA, articulates the reason for starting her blog in an eloquent way -

I start this blog as an acknowledgement to my Ma, Dida, mom-in-law and all the mashis-pishis, kakimas-jethimas who fed me well, fed me good all my years in India...I want to pass on my legacy of Bengali food to my two little daughters and all the other little ones out there who growing up in a foreign land will find a way to connect to their Bangla roots through the smell and taste of Bangla cuisine...So that my daughters don't grow

up believing “paneer butter masala” is India’s national food and they appreciate the layers of taste and flavor that Bengali and food from all over India brings (Mukherjee, ‘Bong Mom’s Cookbook’).

This elaborate *modus operandi* of Mukherjee’s blog operates on the premise of memory as the sole foundation of keeping her cultural roots alive. Her association to food is a means of recollecting her bond with her immediate and extended family of women in the homeland on one hand, and her urge to pass on this legacy to the future generation on the other, thus serving the major purpose of connecting with her “readership through shared memories and common cultural markers” (Sarkar, 2013, p. 6). Within her fold of the larger extended community of women, Mukherjee does not hesitate to invite the “non-Bongs, to try out and sample the nuances of Bengali Cooking” (Mukherjee, ‘Bong Mom’s Cookbook’) for it is essentially through the preparation of food as caretakers of their families that women across time and space are connected. Mukherjee’s endeavours signify her urge to immortalize her identity and native culture in an alien land as she draws comfort from her “spices sputtering in the oil, the waft of the jeera & tejmeta as they turn brown, the rich yellow of my musuri’r dal” which she says, “in this far off land makes me connect to my home” (Mukherjee, ‘Bong Mom’s Cookbook’). This sensitivity to one’s native identity, particularly in the diasporic setup, becomes an integral part of the food blogs.

Personal Narratives in Food Blogs

Feminist food scholarship regards recipe-writing as a socio-cultural discourse and cooking as an assertion of identity. Similar to the participatory concept in storytelling, the discourse of recipes is also participatory in nature as it involves the writer and the readers. In the context of food blogs, it is noticed that recipes are intertwined with stories that are personal in nature. Women in diasporic setup use memories of homeland to create the recipes surrounding personal narratives as an embedded discourse and a deliberate strategy to construct identities.

Sudeshna Banerjee in her food blog, ‘Cook Like a Bong,’ takes the route of narrating personal experiences as a part of almost all her recipes. The essence of memory is interwoven with the recipes which offer a unique identity resonating with the diasporic experiences of the blogger. In one of the *hilsa* fish recipes, Banerjee narrates the story of her *hilsa*-purchase outside Bengal, even though she is not aware of the “non-Kolkata Macher Bajar scene,” in an attempt to try out “something new” (i.e., frying the fish

in microwave), unlike her mother whom she has seen “frying fish in the same old wok” (Banerjee, ‘Cook Like a Bong’). The blogger seems to be writing a new narrative of her identity that breaks free from the memories of her cultural inheritance. For Dhanya, who lives in Melbourne, Australia, and believes in the food philosophy ‘the world on a plate,’ food becomes a bridge to connect different cultures and, therefore, it is through food that she “embraced this new land, its culture and people” (Dhanya, ‘The Spice Adventuress’) which is evident in her recipes from all over the world. Chicago-based Michele Narsinghani’s recipes, are similarly inspired by her “Indian roots, fine-dining in the city, and a little experimentation” (Narsinghani, ‘Mom Under Pressure’) which echoes with Dhanya’s food philosophy. Jayashree Mandal’s blogs, similarly, consist of “many new cuisines and many new ingredients, which were never heard of in our traditional joint Bengali-Indian family [but] also became part of our gastronomic interest” (Mandal, ‘Spice & Curry’). This feeling of creating something new, outside the boundary of established ways, is not limited to the immigrant desire. Pune-based food blogger, Sharmila Guha, in her blog, ‘Kitchene Kichukhonn’ posts several recipes which combines tradition with innovation.

In her post, dated 1st September 2011, she writes about the innovative recipe ‘Hilsa cooked with bottle gourd’, a complete detour from the usual ways of cooking the fish. However, for the diasporic blogger, the urge to break free from the memories of the motherland is sparsely seen in the recipes as food is equated with memories of the homeland (Guha, ‘Kitchene Kichukhonn’). Jayashree Mandal’s *hilsa* post rings in the diasporic writer’s anxiety about the loss of traditions, which if not performed repeatedly may vanish. In her urge to store this tradition, she posts “four recipes in one go” (Mandal, ‘Spice and Curry’) to ensure survival of her Bengali identity. Personal stories in the recipes are the writer’s way of constant negotiations with the memories of homeland. The recipes posted on various occasions are examples of the blogger’s nostalgia for a lost past. The recipe too takes on a different meaning when for example, on the occasion of ‘Poush Shankranti,’ Sudeshna Banerjee recollects how her “Dida (my mom’s mom) would prepare those patishapta sitting near the brick stove (she preferred the brick stove over the gas oven) all day long” (Banerjee, ‘Cook Like a Bong’). Her memories of food are intertwined with the festivities and her grandmother – “...Dida going around the house tying fresh hay to all the door handles in the house. She would also make varieties of *pithey*, the first batch being *Ashkey pithey*. She would store the first batch of *pithey* in an earthenware container as a symbolic offering to gods and later immerse it in the river” (Banerjee, ‘Cook Like a Bong’). Therefore, such

recipes associated with festivities take on an almost ritualistic significance in the diasporic scenario.

Sandeepa Datta Mukherjee in her blog, 'Bong Mom's Cookbook,' takes a similar course of narrating personal stories, albeit in a more elaborate manner. Her recipes and stories are so well integrated that it becomes difficult to distinguish one from the other. An example can be seen in the post 'Ilish Macher Tauk – Heady Memories' where the tale of how the humble head and tail of the *hilsa* fish, unfavoured by the men of the house, turned into a tangy, sweet dish savoured by the women, precedes the actual recipe. The recipe, inherited from her mother and grandmother, turns out to be a personal sojourn for the diasporic blogger into her past, particularly, the joint family set up. The personal narrative takes more of a nostalgic turn with the blogger longing for her mother to visit her and cook this dish in a foreign land, which is a typical immigrant scenario. Similarly, Jhankana's blog strives to retain her Gujarati identity even though she had been raised "with a lot of influence from nationalities other than Indian" (Jhankana, 'The Curry Mommy'). Even after having travelled to "forty-four United States," her recipes narrate personal stories of her homeland. Traditional Gujarati recipes, such as 'Khatta Poodla,' is not recorded without her reminiscences of the past – "My grandmother taught me how to make them at a young age...It's a comforting recipe with memories! I share this recipe weeks after her passing, due to the India Covid wave, in remembrance of her teachings" (Jhankana, 'The Curry Mommy'). This is a common aspect in almost all the food blogs by immigrant women. Indrani in her blog, 'Appayan,' locates her recipes amidst the traditions and rituals of her homeland. Sharmistha's blog, 'Cook-a-Doodle-do,' centralizes Bengali cuisine and the tales that are woven along with the recipes are again fraught with homeland nostalgia. The scripting of personal memories juxtaposed with the recipes creates a richly layered text and in the diasporic scenario, these recipes take the form of narratives of achievement.

Culinary Cultural Repository

Digitizing food narratives serves as an apt strategy for storing memories on one hand and passing on the legacy to future generations on the other. Diasporic women food bloggers attempt to create an important archival memory of their homeland. Their experiences of food take on a new meaning as the shared memory is transported from the private to the public sphere. In an attempt to store the culinary culture of the native land, these bloggers intersperse their personal narratives with the recipes

and immortalize these memories in the digital platform. The stories in the recipes and the recipes in the stories give a unique dimension to food production while making the act a truly special one. In an urge to archive cultural memories related to food, most of the diasporic food bloggers are seen posting traditional recipes of their homeland. Some bloggers like Jayashree Mandal post only traditional Bengali recipes, some of which are almost unheard of in today's time. Nagalakshmi Vishwanathan shows her preference for recipes from Kerala by including a separate category for that variety. Sandeepa Datta Mukherjee also shows her special liking towards authentic Bengali food by categorizing 'All Bengali Recipes', 'Traditional Bengali Recipes', and 'Non-Traditional Bengali Recipes' amidst other Indian and western dishes separately so that interested readers can quickly find their choices. Her personal narratives interwoven with the recipes also make her blog rich in tradition and culture. Her stories in recipes, such as, 'Joynagar er Moya' and 'Kolkata Mishti Doi' immortalize not only the popular desserts, but the culture of the places associated with them. Homeland culture is also intertwined with people and Mukherjee archives their presence through her recipe names, such as, 'Ma-in-law's Macher Dimer Bora Jhol' or 'Ma'r Pepe Shukto'. Mukherjee is not merely a writer of recipes but is a master craft of words which is easily visible in her 'Ramblings'.

Sudeshna Banerjee's blog stands out as a culinary cultural repository as she posts various authentic Bengali cuisines while categorizing recipes posted during various festive occasions, such as, *Noboborsho* (Bengali New Year), *Lakhi* (Lakshmi) Puja, *Makar Shankranti* (Harvest Festival), etc. and an entire category on 'Durga Puja' (Dussehra) with recipes for all the days of the festival. Banerjee also posts articles exclusively on distinctive Bengali food ingredients and their usage, such as, 'panch phoran' (five spices) which is used extensively in various Bengali vegetarian recipes. Another unique feature of her blog is a separate tab titled 'Dictionary' which gives English meanings of fifty-nine vegetables and legumes and thirty-seven different spices written in Bengali. This is indeed a thoughtful addition to the digital space, particularly in the global scenario, where several foodies wondering what 'amaranth' (Bengali - *nyote shaakh*) or 'eggplant/ aubergine' (Bengali - *begun*) in the supermarket or online grocery stores is, will have a sigh of relief.

Verbalized Feminist Act

Feminist food scholarship takes on a different dimension when studied in conjunction with other areas of concern. For example, in the context

of the Canadian space, Jennifer Brady et al. (2018) posits that “feminist food studies must continue to confront the complexities of oppression and privilege that are embedded in legacies of colonialism, whiteness, racism, patriarchy, and classism” (p. 1). Feminist food studies in different parts of the world have highlighted the stereotypes related to the constructed idea of food in relation to the kitchen space and gender roles. This assumes a different turn when studied in terms of space and location. Mehvish Riaz (2022) pinpoints that “rural kitchen is a space where women are oppressed from the perspectives of dependence on men oppressed by the system, association of kitchen with womanhood, unavailability of resources by the state, and access to resources available in an urban kitchen” (p. 252). Similarly, feminist food studies open up new aspects of scholarship in the diasporic space. Food blogging serves various purposes for the diasporic women writers. The blogs become a platform to illustrate their native identity and culture and keep the memories of the homeland intact. The digital platform also provides a new identity to the hitherto silenced voices. Toronto-based Indian food-blogger, Mona, identifies herself as “a homesick Hyderabad foodie muslimah, a home cook, mother, writer and blogger” and says that she intends “to inspire all Hyderabadis to share their tried and tested recipes with the world” (Mona, ‘Zaiqa’).

Like the initiatives of other diasporic food bloggers discussed in this paper, Mona too is on a mission to archive recipes inherited from her ‘ammi’ (mother) which she innovates through her trial-and-error process. Her blog annually hosts ‘Hyderabad Food Festivals’ on the occasion of *Eids*, during which there are calls for recipes to be published in the blog. This initiative is an example of how the marginalized voices are inspired to break their silences. The participatory form of discourse in food blogging is seen in other blogs as well. Sudeshna Banerjee’s blog also hosts such events on special occasions and gives space to food lovers to share their creations. Food blogs also many a times, become platforms for voicing resistance just as any other public domain. For example, Sandeepa Datta Mukherjee’s personal narrative in the post ‘Ilish Macher Tauk – Heady Memories’, which has been discussed earlier in this paper, can also be read in between the lines to detect protest against an essentially patriarchal joint family setup where the men of the house enjoy a favourable position, in this case, the meaty pieces of the fish. Mukherjee’s major pre-occupation in the narrative may not be voicing resistance, but such stories of preferential treatment to some and neglect towards the other are a part and parcel of several discourses on food, not necessarily limited to men and women.

The act of cooking for the family, which many a times, is deprived of any recognition for the woman, is usually performed mechanically in silence. Food blogging has transformed this scenario altogether by bringing in elements of pride and recognition to the otherwise monotonous performance. Women food bloggers are verbal in their pursuits of recording their craft and do not shy away from including their intimate and personal memories related to food. At the same time, several myths related to the act of cooking, which was thought of as a time-consuming activity, demanding the woman's absolute dedication, are done away with. Bloggers like Michele Narsighani calls her blog 'Mom Under Pressure' and claims to prepare quick tasty dishes amidst her "professional, parental, and social activities" (Narsighani, 'Mom Under Pressure'). These bloggers are vocal about balancing different aspects of their lives while nurturing their love, and not mere duty, for cooking. Food blogs and vlogs have transformed the idea related to cooking as an obligation to one which is filled with fun, providing ample space to the blogger/vlogger to voice out her feelings and emotions.

Conclusion

An analysis of select food blogs by immigrant women has revealed that the genre offers a lot of scope for interdisciplinary studies and the platform to include attention to the daily lives of ordinary people and silenced voices. In the diasporic scenario, these blogs provide the opportunity to the authors to immortalize homeland memories of the past. The blogs also become the authors' alter egos, providing them with a newfound identity and voice. Feminist food scholarship in recent times focuses primarily on women's identity as opposed to studies conducted in the past by feminists which hardly "brought a gendered or feminist perspective to their work on food" and rather "focused only on women's food pathologies" (Avakian and Haber, 2005, p. 2). The narrative structure employed in the blogs is different from the usual pre-arranged chronological organization of other written forms and therefore, gives the bloggers ample scope to move back and forth in time and space. The recipes that are posted become special as they are intimately connected to the bloggers' day-to-day activities of cooking for their family, as well as preparing delicacies during festivals, while connecting food to homeland memories. Even though most of the bloggers categorize the posts based on the variety of the recipes or occasions, etc., when read sequentially in terms of the years of the posts, they reveal a narrative of the blogger's identity development. Such a reading also enables to comprehend the blog as a means of digitizing collective cultural memory as well as the continuity of individual identity forma-

tion. While Indian women continue to write passionately in their food blogs, the saga of inheriting, using, re-shaping, and passing on the recipes attain new meanings in terms of identity formation, particularly in the diasporic scenario.

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