

Multilingual Culinary Lexicon and The Cultural Context In India

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Abstract

Food words are not only very popular in India but also, they travel across the linguistic and cultural boundaries. Words such as biryani, dosa and chutney are used in multilingual context, indicating that culinary lexicon and culinary practices move across larger cultural tectonics. These words form an integral part of the vocabulary of any Indian language and even English used in India. They also make a significant contribution to the nation's fabric of participatory democracy by legitimizing the words of many languages in the national imaginary represented by the cultural text and the linguistic experiences. These words also contribute to the function of cultural integration by migrating from one language to another and by holding their representative cultures together. A study of popular culinary vocabulary in India is exciting and rewarding as it opens up the routes and roots of culinary cultural practices and the transmigration of recipes and eating habits. This paper is an attempt to explore the cultural reality of multilingual acceptance of food words within the larger template of their translatability and in-translatability to show the cultural and linguistic conflict, and give and take that happen, within the domain of food. It also explores the possibility of using food as a sociocultural site wherein the multilingual aspirations can be seen as ascribed.

Key Words: Food words, Lexicon, Multilingualism, Multi-culturalism

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When India became independent in 1947, it was made of 571 disorganized princely states. These states were merged together on the basis of political and historical consideration and 27 states were formed. This was a temporary arrangement. Considering the diverse nature in terms of culture and language, there was a need to have states formation on a permanent basis. In 1948, under the chairmanship of S.K. Dhar, a commission was appointed by the central government, to look into the need of

having state reorganization on the basis of language. The committee preferred administrative convenience over language. Again in December 1948, JVP committee including Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabh Bhai Patel and Pattabhi Sitaramayya, was formed to study this concern. The committee rejected the idea of state division on the basis of languages. In 1953, after prolonged agitation and death of one of the volunteers, Andhra Pradesh was formed for Telugu speaking public. In December 1953, Jawaharlal Nehru appointed a committee under the chairmanship of Fazl Ali. The committee recommended 16 states and 3

union territories. Number of states eventually went on to become 29 and 7 territories. If one look at this history, one can see that the current states are formed by merging different parts of different states, where people were speaking the same

language. For example, Maharashtra state was formed by merging Bombay state with some part of Gujarat, some part of Madhya Pradesh and some part of Andhra Pradesh. The following map indicates the provinces which went into the making of Maharashtra.

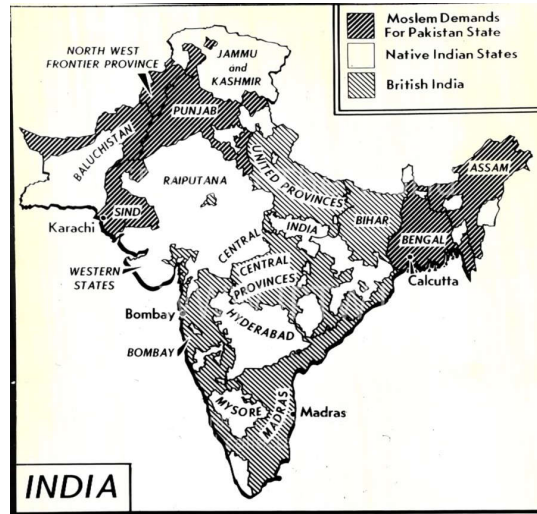


Image courtesy:

<http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00maplinks/modern/maps1947/maps1947.html>
The following map is a representation of states formation plan of 1956.



Image courtesy:

<http://guruprasad.net/posts/1st-may-1960-formation-maharashtra-gujarat-states/>

As per the article one and four, of First Schedule, 1, the states, formation of states on the basis of language lead to merger and formation of states which were originally part of some other states. One of the major reasons for creating new states was the social and cultural associations. The division of states led to certain problems such as regionalism, attrition of national feeling, arrival of regional political parties, demand for separate states, intimidations to sovereignty. Linguistic differences among people resulted in a threat to national integration. Though, linguistic differences resulted in problems, it also led to amalgamation of different cultures, traditions and languages. The culinary vocabulary also flourished and developed due to integration of different cultures.

Culinary culture of different states was mingled together as well the culinary language too. For example, as Gujarat came into existence by merging north part of Bombay provenience, and southern part of Rajputana provenience. Maharashtra state was formed by merging Bombay state with some part of Gujarat, some part of Madhya Pradesh and some part of Andhra Pradesh. If one looks carefully at the cuisine of Maharashtra, the eastern part of Maharashtra like Vidarbha region has influence of Madhya Pradesh in terms of culinary culture including culinary language. Many words like aloopoha, aalooobhat, aalu bhaji, aalu bonda, daal (as it is pronounced in Hindi, because pronunciation in Marathi is different) used in Marathi, show their connection with Madhya Pradesh. Many culinary dishes of south eastern part of Maharashtra i.e. Marathwada region which was part of Nizamshahi earlier has influence

of Nizami cooking style. Some dishes like Murgh Nizami, Naan Khaliya and Tahari are very much part of Marathwada region of Maharashtra.

India has always remained famous for its diversity, be it cultural, geographical or religious. Good climatic conditions, rich flora and fauna, abundant production of crops and availability of food made India, one of the choicest countries for foreigners. Since time immemorial India had been invaded by different foreign rulers. Whenever India was invaded, Indian culinary culture and tradition has been enriched with the influence of their flavors. During the period between 1210 & 1526 Delhi was ruled by Sultans of different dynasties, mainly originating from the central Asia. These dynasties like Slave, Khilji, Tughlaq and Lodi originated basically from different Turkic and Pashtun (Afghan) Muslims. These different dynasties bought the Persian cuisine in India. The dishes such as tandoor, kheema, nan and kebabs were introduced in India during Delhi Sultanate. In 1526, Babur, the founder of Mughal empire, invaded India and defeated Sultan Ibrahim Lodi. Babur was from Timurid Dynasty and of Turko – Mongol origin. Moguls brought lavish use of saffron and dry fruits in the royal kitchens. During Akbar's reign, Mughal cuisine flourished more. Akbar's marital alliance bought cooks from different regions of India to royal kitchen. These different geographical cooking styles fused with Persian cooking style. During Jehangir's period, his wife Noor Jahan used different ideas to create rainbow colour yogurt and legendary wines. The invention of Biryani traces its origin in a story related to

Mumtaaz, wife of Shah Jahan. It is said that, when she visited army camp, she found that army men are weak. So, she advised cook to prepare a special dish which was a combination of rice and meat using spices and Biryani was invented. The unique feature of Mughal cuisine was use of ground and whole spices and extensive use of cream, butter and milk. Over the centuries the dishes from Mughal era had survived and are still consumed across India and are known by their traditional names. For instance, biryani, pulao, sheer korma, shahitukra, kulfi and firni. When Portuguese invaded India, they brought chili, custard apple, papaya, garlic, potato and tomato with them. These ingredients have become inseparable part of Indian cuisine now. Britishers brought with them cake, butter, bread, biscuits, ketchup, jam, jelly, chocolates, ice creams and beer. These dishes have become inseparable part of Indian cuisine now.

There are some words, which has travelled in India through the traders. For instance, the word chaihas; its origin in China. The word 'Cha' has its origin in Mandarin language. The leaf travelled to India through Persia. On this route, the Mandarin word 'Cha' became Persian 'Chay'. In Hindi it is called as 'Chai' in Marathi, it is 'Chaha', in Bengali 'Cha', in Telugu and Malayalam 'Chaya'. Pistachio was one of the gifts to Indian cuisine from Arabs. In Hindi, Marathi, Malayalam, Gujarati language it is called as Pista.

Some words indicate migration of culinary practices as for example, Biryani is known by its name pan India. Dishes like Pulao, Puri, Paneer, Daal, Idli, Dosa, Papad, Chaat are known by these names across India.

These culinary terms indicate how they make regional languages multilingual with their presence. These terms are not translated into English or into regional languages but rather used as they are.

Culinary terms like aloo tikki, aloo gobi, aloo palak, chana, garam masala, ghee, gulab jamun, gosht, kofta, korma, kulcha, kulfi, lassi, makhana – dal makhani, paneer makhani, murgh makhana – naan, pakora, paneer, paratha, raita, roti, samosa, tandoori, tikka, chapati are used across India in all languages. They are also a part of English and have found their place in English dictionaries. Beverages like jaljeera and neera are known by their names across India. These words are linguistically receptive in all Indian languages.

Culinary vocabulary also includes words that are culture-specific in each language. For instance, rolling pin is called as belan in Hindi, latana in Marathi, uruttalmul in Tamil, mavuparattunnavadi in Malayalam, and belona in Assamese. The dish like Panipuri which is available across India, is known by different names in India. For example, the dish is known as Panipuri in Maharashtra, Phuchka in Bihar, Jharkhand and west Bengal, Gol gappe in northern India, Pakodi/Phulki in Gujarat, Pani ke patashe in Haryana, Pani ke patashe/patashi in Lucknow, Gupchup in Orissa, Tikki in Hoshangabad, Madhya Pradesh, Padaka in Aligarh in Uttar Pradesh. All these terms indicate how common culinary practices are known in different terms.

Traditional dishes are passed down from one generation to another. When people migrate, they carry culinary culture and terms with them. It becomes one of the ways to remain connected with their roots. These migrants

want to remain close to their roots and create routes for foodways. Culinary practices become a part of their identity even in host nations. Food is one of the ways of preserving their culture in exile or in diaspora. In most of such cases, traditional food becomes comfort food. Preparing and serving traditional dishes is a part of showcasing culinary culture in a new place and is often a matter of pride. People of Indian diaspora in the United States and the United Kingdom continue preparing and consuming their traditional dishes such as upma, dosa, paratha, curry, daal, samosa, wada, chaat, idli etc. These terms are also evoked almost on a daily basis in their use of English and thereby have made English receptive to these terms. Further, these terms have also found a place in English dictionaries showing the openness of English to multilingualism and multiculturalism.

Internal migration of people too has been significantly impactful in making Indian regional languages multilingual, especially in the context of culinary practices. For instance, Marathi has included in its lexis, many south Indian words such as idli, sambhar, dosa and rassam, due to the presence of many south Indians and their culinary practices in many parts of Maharashtra. Similarly, south Indian states

have well adopted and naturalized many terms such as paratha, biryani, pulao and puri due to the presence of north Indians in these regions. Similar is a popularity of Bengali dishes in other states of India. Rosgulla and Sondesh are distinctly such terms that have added to the culinary bandwidth and culinary vocabulary of many Indian languages. It is not uncommon to have dishes named after places though they are found across the entire nation. Mysore paak, Banarasipaan and Kolkattaapaan are not to be eaten only in the regions of their origins as much filter coffee which is now available in many states of India. Similarly, Kashmiri kawa, Hyderabad Biryani and Rajasthani Dal Batiare now consumed and referred to in many states. There are also state or city specific dishes, for instance, Hyderabad Zafrani Biryani, Hyderabad Haleem and Kolhapuritambda or pandhararassa.

The above discussion indicates the fact that people, cultures and languages have dynamic realities. They move across many boundaries in the process of becoming more inclusive to reflect the effect of global transmigration of culinary and cultural practices. The analysis also indicated that, culinary vocabulary of any given is multi-lingual as it is shaped by the dynamic practice of experiments with food.