Eating Spaces, Resisting Creation

A study of creation and consumption of travel-based food shows on regional and national television

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Abstract

The dynamics of the market post liberalization of the Indian economy in the 1990s have permeated both, the urban middle class and rural households, setting a trend of negotiation with the 'exotic foreign' through an introduction to newly available ingredients, cooking techniques and food items. The foray of the television in the interaction of food cultures (particularly through travel-based food shows) has transformed geographical 'places' into virtual 'spaces' bringing out questions of 'reality', 'authenticity' and 'exoticness' or 'mundaneness'. One could propose that the rise of regional television networks in the past decade has created a space for more 'authentic' regional and sub-regional representation on television. This paper looks to understand the creation and consumption of travel-based food shows on regional and national television to explore the continuities and changes in cooking and consumption choices of urban and rural audiences. Through a discussion on region and nation, food and identity, and television, space and market economy, the paper makes a case for regional television as a possible resistance to the national.

Keywords

Television, cuisine, food culture, identity, global, national, regional, sub-regional.

Introduction

The interaction of food cultures in the era of globalization is marked by an accelerated pace of information transfer and increased mobility of people and cuisines. The foray of the electronic medium of television in the interaction of food cultures, particularly through travel-based food shows, has transformed earlier 'unknown', 'foreign' places, lifestyles and cuisines into virtual spaces that are closer to us. The liberalization of the Indian economy in the 1990s has also widened the food market in India, a corollary of which has been the availability of packaged food and 'foreign' products. The dynamics of the market have permeated both, urban middle class as well as rural households, setting off a trend of negotiation with the 'exotic foreign' through an introduction to newly available ingredients, cooking techniques and food items.

The televisual medium holds the potential to transform geographical 'places' into virtual 'spaces', which paves the way for discussions on how travel-based food shows tackle questions of 'reality', 'authenticity' and the 'exoticness' or 'mundaneness' of these spaces. In this light, one could propose that the consistent rise of regional television networks in the past decade has created a space for more 'authentic' regional and sub-regional representation on television, possibly due to its ability to make more contextualized connections between cuisine, region and identity.

This paper looks to address some key questions related to the creation and consumption of travel-based food shows on regional and national television. It looks at the 'visibilisation' of consumption through a creation of 'placeless foodscapes', the role of constructed spaces in increased consumption and the scope for 'authentic' spatial representation by regional, national

and international television. Through a discussion on the linkages between region and nation, food and identity, and television, space and market economy, the paper makes a case for regional television as a possible resistance to the national.

Methodology

The questions in this paper are addressed through data collection done in three parts. The first part was an analysis of food and travel shows on and off air on television channels. The textual analysis of the Maharashtra-based episodes of a television show *Chakh le India*[1] on the channel NDTV Good Times served to observe the particular notions of the 'exotic and authentic' presented therein. A simultaneous observation of trends of other shows such as *Khana Khazana* on Zee TV, *Cook it up with Tarla Dalal* on Sony TV[2], *Gourmet Central* and *No Big Deal* on NDTV Good Times, *Kylie Kwong's My China*, the *Nigella* series and *World Cafe Asia* on TLC[3] also served to locate these notions.

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[1] Chakh Le India is a television show hosted by model turned actor Aditya Bal on the lifestyle channel NDTV Good Times. NDTV Good Times is one of the first ever travel and lifestyle channels in India. It comes under the ownership of Mr. Vijay Malaya and NDTV networks. It appears to cater to urban audience and several shows seem to follow a pattern of Travel & Living channel in terms of show topics and formats. The language used is a mixture of Hindi and English. Episodes shown to the respondents were from the third season which claimed to explore rural, rustic India. The episodes shown to respondents covered two towns along coastal Maharashtra; Sawantwadi and Ratnagiri.

[2] Zee TV and Sony TV are national level entertainment channels in India.

[3] TLC (Travel & Living channel in Asia) is a lifestyle channel owned by Discovery Communications. It has a wide range of shows related to health, hobby, food, travel and lifestyle. Shows started initially in English but are now dubbed in Hindi as well.

The second part included ten semi-structured interviews conducted in June 2011 with middle-middle to upper middle class women between the ages of thirty and fifty living in Pune, the second largest city in Maharashtra. Respondents were married, had children and hailed from varied regional, caste, linguistic and religious backgrounds. They were asked about their television viewing habits, food habits and cooking practices and were also asked to draw upon their personal and television experience of food and travel, explain their idea of interesting food shows and their take on 'authenticity'. Respondents have been presented as U1, U2... U9, U10 through the paper.

The third part of the data collection was conducted in November 2011 in two semi-urban cities in Maharashtra, namely Oros and Vengurla, and the capital city of Goa - Panaji. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight women between the ages of forty and eighty. Respondents were married, belonged to middle-middle and lower middle class households and hailed from Sindhudurg and Ratnagiri districts of Maharashtra. Most women were aware of some amount of cooking and travel shows on television, mainly through regional language based shows. The respondents were interviewed regarding their daily cooking, buying, eating and television watching habits, along with specific questions on representation of their *own* space on *Chakh le India*. They were asked to draw parallels between representation on national and regional television shows to touch upon questions of cuisine and identity, notions of 'authenticity' and the 'exotic'. Respondents have been presented as R1, R2... R7, R8 through the paper. Both rural and urban interviewees were chosen by purposive sampling. All respondents were women and had at least some exposure to food and travel shows on television. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the help of separate interview guides.

The above methods of data collection, along with available literature, have formed the basis for this study. It is by no means exhaustive, but illustrative of the complex ways in which food and travel shows have seeped into food and consumption cultures today. The aim of the study is to understand how regional travel-based food shows are related to their national counterparts, and if they hold the potential to act as resistance to the homogenizing nature of the latter.

Television and Cuisine in India: A background

Ananda Mitra (1993) discusses the development of television and ensuing consumption changes in India. At the point of entry in 1959, television in India was restricted to Doordarshan. Variety was limited and most programmes, save some based on Hindi feature film songs, were located within the 'educative' mode. A remarkable transition in television technology and programming was seen around the SITE project in 1976 and the Asian Olympics (ASIAD) in 1982, which marked the advent of coloured, commercial television and a transition from education-based to entertainment-based content. Changes in government policy resulted in greater autonomy, entry of private advertisers and sponsored programs based on airtime and an overall amelioration in television technology. Changes in content, production, transmission and reception of television shows enhanced the overall the television viewing experience.

At the same time, the regional television scenario also underwent a transformation. Shields and Muppidi (1996) understand this as a "move toward provision of local language fare" to "maximize audience size" in the advent of foreign satellite networks to ward off the dangers of "cultural invasion". Thus, the entry of privatized television networks also brought to fore

regional television through eleven regional language-based channels of the Doordarshan network. The first ever privately-owned regional network was introduced in 1992 through the Tamil Sun TV (India), followed by Raj TV Network and the Malayalam Asianet Communications Ltd. in 1994. By early 2000, Indian networks such as Zee Sun and ETV had churned out a multitude of regional language channels, which presently stand diversified on the basis of genres such as news, films, music and general entertainment.

The move towards globalization and the liberalisation of the Indian economy around 1991 intensified privatization and consequently, the commercialised nature of television at large. This was also marked by a mushrooming of food shows, possibly due to a better sensual experience of food. The latest television technology highlighted texture and colour, allowing for a more detailed visual experience. Elements such as smell and taste that could not be captured and communicated through video were compensated for through descriptive details about 'buttery soft tart shells', teaming it up with tight shots and the occasional 'pull-focus' to create the experience of being close to the food in the virtual medium.

While only a marginal section of urban viewers had access to international food shows such as *Madhur Jaffery's Flavours of India*, a large section watched Indian versions such as *Khana Khazana* hosted by noted chef Sanjeev Kapoor and *Cook it up with Tarla Dalal* by popular cookbook author Tarla Dalal. These shows were among the first ever ones that helped liken home-made dishes to their counterparts in the restaurant by showcasing innovative recipes, cooking methods, tips and tricks. It is important to note that the above-mentioned food shows

93

remained essentially studio-based and recipe-oriented[4] as opposed to *Madhur Jaffery's Flavours of India* which made an attempt to travel to a place to showcase its food. It was around the entry of infotainment channels such as the Discovery Channel and travel and lifestyle shows such as *The Great Escape* on Star Plus that we see this shift. It is, however, important to mention, that this change did not occur as quickly in the regional television context. Food shows on regional Marathi television such as *Aamhi Saare Khavayye* and *Mejwani Paripurna Kitchen* still air several recipe-based food shows with occasional segments of travel and exploration of new spaces, the only exception being *Khadya Bhramanti*[5] which takes viewers on a virtual food and sightseeing tour in every episode.

Food Television: A Classed Consumption of the 'Exotic'

The increased consumption of the 'exotic, unknown' in the globalized scenario, be it through food television or the food market, has class dimensions. The answer to the question of who consumes and why, lies in levels of affordability. The possibility of unlimited consumption through constant expenditure is possible only in the case of those that possess that much financial capital to sustain this process. How does a section with lower economic power define the 'exotic'? Does its purchasing power allow it to participate in newly available food knowledge and processes adequately?

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[4] The format of food shows where the stress was on the illustration of cooking the recipe.

[5] *Khadya Bhramanti* is a show on the regional network channel, ETV Marathi, watched by the urban, middle class and semi-urban Maharashtrian alike. This show has a participatory format which includes travel to various parts of Maharashtra to viewers' houses for the discovery of food and tourism within the region. As of March 2012, it was telecast on weekdays at 6 p.m. with a repeat show every day at 3 p.m.

It is interesting to note how differently the 'exotic unknown/foreign' is defined among the rural and urban audience. The urban audience understands it either as international locales on a must-visit wish list or the 'rustic' village set-up that is brought to it on the platter of rural tourism. In this context, the urban consumer has taken to experimentation with the 'exotic' in roughly two ways. One has involved experimentation with food that is perceived as original and authentic to the region, without a change in ingredients, cooking processes and methods, upheld by a section of people that is relatively well-travelled and/or that has gathered a fair amount of specialised knowledge. The need to maintain status quo stems perhaps, from a sense of superiority of knowledge and experience made possible by opportunities available to the upper middle class. Respondent U7 argues,

> *You can't cook something which requires zucchini with a turai* (ridge gourd)*. The taste is not the same. So if you can get a zucchini, you always try it out with a zucchini.*

The other trend is of experimentation with new flavours and ingredients and their combination with existing ones to cook up something that adds zing to the familiar, which makes the slight tweaking of processes and ingredients depending upon their availability not only acceptable but desirable. As expressed by respondent U5,

> *I make changes with whatever is available to me. If I can't find parsley, I use dhaniyapatta* (coriander leaves)*.*

Either way, the very definition of the unknown in both respects can be owed to a certain amount of financial and cultural capital related to the unknown, which makes it a matter of choice and preference to experiment. The onslaught of food and travel shows and channels on national and

regional television especially post the year 2000 has ensured that the access to exclusive information and 'professional' cooking skills and techniques is no longer restricted to the chef within and outside the television screen. The curiosity aroused by the information overload on food and travel television has been satiated by the availability of purchasable foreign food items, be it in the form of cooking in or eating out (Ghosh 2012).

The 'exotic' for the relatively less-travelled rural audience seems to be anything outside his/her closed geographical area of origin but which is not too removed from it. For respondent R5, the foreign region starts where Vengurla, or largely where Sindhudurg District ends. 'Foreign' influences in cooking hence include the transformation of day-to-day traditional coastal *taandul* (rice) and *jondhali* (sorghum) based items such as *ghavaney*, *amboli*, *khaapurley*, *idli* to the entry of wheat grains for chapatis.

Respondent R7 explains changes in food during festivals,

> *Diwali faraal[6] in my childhood was not like it is today. We would have only gul-pohe* (soaked rice flakes with jaggery) *and boiled sweet potatoes. There was no concept of tikkhat pohe* (spiced soaked riceflakes)*. My grandmother would take a huge tope (wide mouthed vessel) and mix the jaggery and pohe and we would distribute this mixture along with the boiled sweet potatoes to the neighbours in bhindi (okra) leaves. But now we have*

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[6] *Faraal* are food items made during the festival of *Diwali.*

the fifty things like shev, chiwda, karanji, rava/boondi/shev/shengdana laadoos[7] and the

like.

'Foreign' influences, in this case seem to extend to intra-regional influences before those of a different state or country. Intra-regional shifts often seem to hint at a shift from the regional non-mainstream to mainstream, such as in the case of the Diwali goodies. The transition from *gul-pohe* to *shev* and *chakli* suggests a change in festival food practices through a possible brahminization of the same. The move towards the modern first starts with the acceptance of the mainstream within the region (which in this case could be caste-based), after which the community is understood as ready to consume the national and international 'foreign'.

In the absence of adequate monetary power, a travel and food show thus, does not build as 'achievable' an aspiration in the mind of the semi-urban viewer as is done in the case of the affluent, urban viewer. In this case, the desire to travel and eat is satiated rather than created. It would not be erroneous to say that the level to which the 'exotic' is experienced and 'conquered' also depends on the monetary power and ease of access to space in the hands of the explorer. In fact, the attempt of an individual from a lower middle class or semi-urban middle class background to explore new areas and territories would more likely be branded as 'inauthentic appropriation' rather than a rightful 'exploration'. For example, the attempt of Malwani-speaking Maharashtrian from the coastal town of Sawantwadi to try out his/her own rendition of the pizza

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[7] *Shev* (salted noodle like gramflour fritters), *chiwda* (a mixture of fried cereal, nuts and dry fruits spiced with curry leaves, mustard, asafoetida, turmeric, coriander and cumin powder), *karanji* (a crescent-shaped fritter with an outer covering of flour and semolina filled with grated coconut, jaggery/sugar and dry fruits), *laadoos* (ball-shaped sweet made from a variety of ingredients. The ones R7 mentions are made from *shev*, *rava* (semolina), *boondi* (globule-like gramflour fritters) and *shengdana* (groundnuts).

at home on a *tawa* would not be labelled as 'the quest for exploration' as easily as the exploration of a small village in the same region on *Chakh le India* by the upper caste, upper class television host Aditya Bal. The assumed access to space and superior knowledge of the 'authentic' thus, is reserved for the urban middle class that has 'developed' tastes and techniques to appreciate flavours, textures and experiences and much greater opportunities to learn and explore.

Contrary to the acceptance of the liberalized food market by the urban middle class today (which has consequently brought changes in cooking patterns), rural respondents find that regional shows cater to their context in a better way, since suggestions to substitute ingredients and techniques are made by the show itself. The absence of a larger amount of affluence in this case makes the person innovate with available resources. The luxury of purchasing a new food item or a kitchen accessory such as an oven, and letting it remain unused after little usage, requires the possession of a certain amount of capital that allows the space for wastage. It is this fundamental factor that disallows the non-affluent to take part in the process of culinary exchange at the same level as the urban middle class. Respondent R5 elucidates,

> *As a young housewife, I would hunt new ingredients down. I would buy things like capsicum and try to make bhajis (pakodas/fritters)... but there were many things I wanted to buy and couldn't afford...*

An interesting addition is made by respondent R6:

> *I don't try out stuff too much. You see, we hardly get those specific ingredients. Even if you get the new ingredients mentioned in the show, you buy it once to try the dish out, and then*

it goes to waste. Like if you want to make cake, you need to get something called baking powder. You can't make it well without that. But then the rest goes to waste because no one uses it, so it's better to get cake from a shop. My daughter would bake a cake once in a while, and she had her ways. She would heat a tawa, put some sand on it and then keep the dish on it. That way the cake would get cooked without getting burnt. So we find our ways around it. Those people who show it on TV have all the ingredients and accessories, but we don't.

The above quote illustrates the nature of exploration of the 'unknown' and trial of new food products and techniques in the rural set up. In a case where a person is unable to own a variety of oils, sauces and spices previously foreign to him/her, the process of culinary exploration is thus, rendered incomplete. The transfer of knowledge regarding cuisines is measured against monetary value, where the elements of interaction are monetised and tweaked to create desire rather than satiate it. The process of interaction between varied cultures through their cuisines, thus, seems almost exclusive of those who do not possess the power to purchase and consume in the age of globalisation. Hence, the interaction of cultures on 'equal' terms though seemingly possible through mediums such as food becomes much less accessible than expected. In fact, the language of a show such as *Chakh le India*, quite clearly suggests that an attempt to turn members of the rural audience - a lower income group - into 'explorers' is not even made. It is an audience that is unable to consume beyond a point, due to which it is not subjected to an incessant creation of the desire to explore. Within the agenda of uninterrupted consumption then, the rural gets established as the exotic that holds a multitude of interesting stories for 'exploration' by the affluent urban middle class.

99

The Creation and Consumption of the Exotic

If there is one change that may be labelled as most prominent in the present stage of globalisation, it is the experience of the spatio-temporal flexibility. Almost everything, ranging from natural phenomena to the interaction of cultures, experiences this flexibility, where few things are restricted to season or geographical region. Likewise, the media experience of cuisine may also be said to come out of and be sustained as a result of the 'warping' of time and space. The televisual medium transforms physical territories into 'palatable' spaces for consumption largely for the 'keen-to-consume' urban middle class. However, the 'non-mainstream' class is not devoid of agency as it tries to resist 'mainstream' attempts at packaging it in several visible and invisible ways.

At the very outset, it is important to understand how space has been defined in the ensuing discussions. Lefebvre (1991) states,

> …space is a product… the space thus produced also serves as a tool of thought and of action…"

According to Lefebvre, each space is 'spatialized' in its own unique way which can be explained by understanding how the modes of production and social regimes within it work. The spatialization is connected with the individual through spatial practices and representations, and spatial codes isolate and fragment everyday life.

A spatialization of a geographical territory through an electronic medium would therefore be a complex process of creation of spaces according to certain protocols. The creation and perception of culinary spaces on television, and *Chakh le India* in particular, may be understood through Lefebvre's triad; a three-part dialectic to bring out the ideas of perceived, conceived and lived space. Perceived space may be understood as a production of relations between objects and products which result in spatial practices or processes that secrete society's space. Conceived space refers to representations of space which form ideological, linguistic and symbolic relations between lived space and a conceptual framework. The third- lived space- refers to representational spaces experienced through associated images and symbols which emerge from a relation between spatial practice and representations of space.

The perceived space of the rural (e.g.: the town of Sawantwadi) is the representation of a space that arises out of certain notions that the producers of the show already have about the rural, where certain production values and practices are used to create the conceived space of the rural. Thus, the particular spatial practices through symbols such as 'tribal dances', 'mystic air', 'unusual aromas' and 'exotic spices', and accompanying camera angles, music and script create the conceived space, which in turn is expected to give the audience an experience of the lived space of the rural in the television show.

It is important to note that the focus of the show as either food or travel based is based on the conventions and practices which create conceived space, which in this case could be images, words and sound. While on one hand the anchor describes his journey on the motorbike through the various landscapes and sceneries, he does not dwell upon them as much as the final

destination, which is any space that contains the food of the region. The creation of a virtual space, thus, is heavily dependent on the spatial practices or the conceived space, which ultimately allows for the experience of the lived space for the audience. Thus, if the perceived and conceived spaces contain strands of unequal power dynamics, the lived experience of the space represents communities and cuisines from the same perspective.

> *(Rural) food is far tastier than our present gadget-based cooking. So this show (Chakh le India) tells you about how much more passionate people in the village are about cooking. You know, they are chefs in their own way, where they do everything from scratch and nothing (readymade) is available in the market...* -Respondent U6

In the above case, respondent U6 seems to have constructed an image of the rural space as monolithic. This perception tends to view rural communities with the nostalgia of the prehistoric, thereby understanding them as static, unchanging entities that represent the ancestral virtues of innocence, hospitality and warmth. *Chakh le India*, in this respect, may be understood as a show that looks to 'package' rural communities and spaces to satiate the nostalgic desires of the urban affluent. The show appears to present the unusual life-worlds of 'rural villagers' to an audience that largely speaks English and which can possess or at least understand the value of items that make up the anchor's appearance such as the expensive motorbike, helmet, aviator sunglasses, jacket and shoes. In fact, the anchor chooses to explain the spongy texture of the banana flower made by the local resident in Kandivili[8] village by drawing parallels with mushrooms. The above

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[8] A village in the Sindhudurg district of Maharashtra visited by anchor Aditya Bal during a show on Sawantwadi and its neighbouring regions on *Chakh le India.*

choice indicates an assumption of a certain level of exposure of the audience to 'exotic' ingredients like mushrooms, recently made available by the market economy. The space perceived and conceived by the show thus changes the very lived experience of the region and cuisine. An 'inconsistency' in representation, however, is brought to fore by the respondent aware of minute specifics of the region and cuisine. Respondent R3 and R1 elucidate;

Their (Chakh le India's) method of making fish was different from ours. Their curry recipe used dry chilli, dry coriander and turmeric. We generally make a curry with green chillies, garlic, black peppercorns and coconut, marinate and cook the fish in this chutney... there is no phodni (tempering)... may be a little bit of onion. But today there are these readymade fish masalas that include red chilli. May be how they (Chakh le India) make it.

-Respondent R3

It's really nice to see our region on TV... but this (representation) will not do. Malwani food is very different. The way this guy made the chicken...is similar but still different from how we make it. The masala is different. There is more coconut...and dry coconut mind you. Not so much fresh coconut. Respondent R1

The creation of spaces from geographical regions on television also creates paradoxes of time and space in the representation of cuisines and cultures. Cuisine is considered to be a concept located in geographical territory and a travel and food show aims to address this very localised nature and time-specificity. However, the process of audio-visual documentation renders the geographically embedded area outside its physical realm, changing the localised experience of

cuisine to a 'placeless' and 'timeless'[9] experience. Connections between a heterotopia (Foucault 1967) and a 'placeless foodscape' (Morgan et al., 2008) may be drawn at this point to examine the placeless nature of spaces created on television. The placeless foodscape includes all the temporal, spatial, corporeal, sensual, affective and sense of place of the food, except that of physical space and time. Food spaces on television are therefore placeless foodscapes as they try to show cuisine in its entirety sans the spatio-temporal and physical context. The paradox of placelessness is brought out in such a scenario. The more the show tries to add context and 'authenticity' to the represented space, the further it moves away from its actual geographical location by virtue of its 'created' nature. Respondent U1 explains,

> *If I have a general idea (from television or restaurants) of what Mediterranean cuisine is supposed to be like… if I have some understanding of the flavours and textures and typical ingredients of the region, I can create something that tastes Mediterranean on my own.*

As is evident, the notions created in the minds of the viewer regarding the food of a place tend to be in accordance with the space s/he has consumed on television. As a basic premise, one may propose that food and space create each other. The food of Greece, in the above context, is created by the space that is within Greece. Hence, the geographical conditions such as climate, water availability and soil-type give rise to the kind of ingredients and food patterns in Greece. Here, space (a combination of social structures, history and geography) creates food. A viewer of

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[9] By timeless here, we mean the scrunching or expansion of time through the show. For example, the amount of time required to cook banana flower is much more than is shown in the episode. However, the viewer, by virtue of plenty of television viewing experience, understands the tendency of stretching and compression of space and time within the electronic medium. S/he takes it for granted that this warping is done due to time constraints, and does not expect to finish cooking the recipe that fast in 'real time'.

a travel and food show on Greece may be exposed to certain markers of 'Mediterranean-ness' of the Greek cuisine in ingredients such as olive oil, tomatoes, cous-cous and seafood. Therefore, when eating in a Greek restaurant or trying out a dish at home, the viewer expects to experience similar flavours and textures, in which case, the space (Greece) is created by the Mediterranean-ness of the food shown on television, which may possibly be his/her only exposure to Greece. Thus, space and food may be said to create and re-create each other time and again.

The experience of a virtual space by the audience accompanied by opportunities provided by the market economy renders spaces 'packaged' for consumption in the present state of globalisation. Ketchum (2005) discusses the process of construction of cuisines and spaces which create the desire to posses more and more, be it the knowledge of a new place, a culinary experience, a souvenir from a trip or a buyable food product. The space, through the interaction of the conceived and perceived space renders the created space as a world of fantasy, desire and sensual pleasure. It instructs consumers on how to buy, process and consume food not only as a biological activity, but also initiates consumption of cuisines and food-related lifestyles.

The television today, is one of the key factors in the visibilisation of consumption. One part of this visibilisation occurs through the choice of the space considered for visibilisation, that is to say, *what* is visibilised. The very start to an analysis of power structures on food and travel shows must be at the question of who has had access to content creation on television over time. The long spell of government ownership of television, later replaced by private ownership, has essentially allowed access to remain in the hands of a certain group, which in this case would mean those associated with the upper caste, upper class, able-bodied Hindu male. In most cases,

the dominant and the affluent go hand in hand, and content within the travel and food genre has essentially been 'targeted' at the already affluent or aspiring class. Needless to say, content on such television would therefore be created according to codes familiar to the dominant class, with a simultaneous rendering of the dominant as 'mainstream'. The 'non-mainstream' was initially shunned from public view, where television content comprised essentially of stories of members from, for and by the 'mainstream'. The recent times have seen a shift in focus to stories of the non-mainstream; cultures and spaces of the 'non-mainstream' have been visibilized. However, most representation has been burdened by a gaze of exoticisation. The travel and food genre particularly, has found innumerable 'packagable' stories from the 'exotic' life-worlds of the 'non-mainstream' owing to the diversity made available by them. Cook (2008) brings to fore the danger of essentialization and decontextualization of exoticised cultures;

> ...the essentialized versions of (culinary) culture that might be criticized by mainstream critics can be seen as created (and policed) by mainstream consumers, retailers, food writers, etc., rather than simply being 'ethnic' entrepreneurs' misguided, backward, introverted ways of thinking… It's therefore important to be wary of 'apparently progressive approaches to culture, nationhood and ethnicity, as when multiculturalism means the consumerist commodification of "exotic" ethnic cultures, while the geographies of segregation and racial privilege remain unchanged…(Cook, 2008; 823 - 824)

Thus, there is an extraction of the local 'other' from its geographical place, a packaging for the mainstream and a re-insertion into an appropriate space for consumption by the affluent. Feagan (2007) discusses the shift from local to global and back (to local), through his analysis of the

106

revival of the linkage between food and *terroir*. *Terroir* is a traditional French term referring 'to an area or terrain, usually rather small, whose soil and microclimate impart distinctive qualities to food products';

> … Tying food to place via '*terroir*' has contemporary manifestations in 'labels of origin', the marketing and cultural branding of food through its association with place… The specialty food products (SFPs)… are premised on consumers placing 'greater value on products which they can associate with a region, pays, *terroir* or method of production'… (Barham, 2003; 131)

The resurgence of the emphasis on the local in the Indian context has, however, had implications on its representation of the regional on television. The 'look and feel' of Sawantwadi and its neighbouring areas in *Chakh le India* as a rural space is through an incorporation of signs and symbols into the television text that are considered to be typical signifiers of rurality. An emphasis is seen on using signifiers typically understood to convey tradition and non-modernity such as earthen vessels, *chulhas* (wood fired stoves), and older chopping and grinding accessories[10] in the kitchen. Of course, these symbols are not the only signifiers of the space. However, their repeated use renders them as 'normal', and essentializes the entire space to those

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[10] During the illustration of recipes in the Sawantwadi episode in *Chakh le India*, several traditional methods and devices of cookery are shown. While cooking the 'kelicha bond' (banana flower and green legume dish), a resident of Kandivili village uses a *jaata* (a vertically elongated mortar with an iron pestle, generally used to grind dry masalas) to grind fresh Malwani masala from whole ingredients. In the section where the anchor cooks a Malwani chicken curry recipe for the Dhangar tribe in Nemle village, he uses *paata-varvanta* (a horizontal stone slab across which the pestle is moved horizontally) to grind wet masala for the curry. The ingredients are chopped and peeled with different cutting equipment such as the *vili* (a curved blade with a jagged-edged 'coconut scraper' rising out of a flat, rectangular wooden base).

few, 'typical' signs, as a result of which, the audience also looks for the same to mark a particular representation as 'authentic'. Respondent U6 elucidates,

... Imagine a remote village in Madhya Pradesh... If the recipe books or recipe based shows show the (correct) masalas but which are being ground in a mixer-grinder, cooking on a nice four-burner... in your day to day life you're stuck with these appliances anyway, but when you break out of them, (watching) cooking becomes enjoyable. (Like) in Chakh le India, they show how the people grind (masalas) on a hamamdasta (large vertical grinding mortar), *or cook in a chulha.*

Respondents R8 and R6, on the other hand, tell us a different story of the rural.

Of course the mixer ruins the flavour because the speed burns the masala out. The flavour is reduced as opposed to grinding slowly on a paata varvanta... But we still make fish curry with fresh masalas on the paata varvanta. Because if there is no electricity, what does one do?

The taste of food on a chulha is different from the food cooked on the gas. You get this smoked/burnt taste from a chulha. Actually it also depends on what you're used to. Because now mixers, pressure cookers are used widely. They reduce time. So it's fine.

The paradox of space is brought to fore yet again, since the very attempt to make the audience experience the space in all its authenticity is rendered fallacious due to the considerable amount of generalization. Adichie (2009) warns us of the 'danger of a single story', where she suggests that "...the single story creates stereotypes... the problem with stereotypes is not that they are

untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story." Thus, she discusses the need for multiple perspectives on ideas and spaces, so as to avoid the danger of essentialization. While the travel-based food show often looks to show different areas, the typical use of words, gestures, images and sound lends the space a single identity which, in most cases, plants the 'represented' in a lower position within the power structure. The globalized scenario of the present day thus, renders the regional desirable and consumption worthy to an audience that possesses specific class, caste and gender characteristics, has access to knowledge and financial resources required to consume according set protocols of *what* may be consumed, *where, when* and *how*. Consumption patterns are a sum of not only active choices of the audience, but also certain representational modes that inform and shape these choices over time.

Television as Resistance: The Regional, National and Global

While the dangers of essentialization and commodification of the non-mainstream have been highlighted so far, an important offshoot of the interaction of food cultures remains unexplored. There is no denying that minority communities and their practices are exoticised for consumption by the affluent middle classes, which has been consistently observed in televisual representations. However, it is important to throw light on the efforts of these communities to overcome the domination they face as well. Cook et al (2006) term this attempt at resistance by the minority community as an attempt to 'counter-decontextualize' the community's representation. The community, thus, looks to defetishize and decommodify itself by creating alternative spaces and images which it considers as more true to its actuality.

It is within this context that Lefebvre's idea of space as power gains importance. According to Lefebvre, each element of the society must create its own specific space which can become a marker of its power. In most cases, the production of space tends to be aimed at the re-creation of hegemonic class dominance. In this sense, the non-creation of a space by a 'weaker' section would render it 'spaceless' and hence, powerless, who would then be dominated by the powerful who have access to their own specific space. Thus, each segment of society must develop and nurture its own spatial practices, which allow it to dwell within its own space. Physical space and social space thus become interlinked, where the access to one automatically translates into access to the other.

The idea of space and territory becomes important in the light of the linkages between spatialization of territories and the ensuing representational issues. Bonnemaison (2000) differentiates between space and territory, suggesting that territory provides the first space for identification of the self and therefore a sense of belonging through which all cultures are spatially 'organized' and 'localized'. One observes a constant interaction between geography and culture through a give and take where each influences the other. The inextricable link of cuisine to territory and territory to identity could be used to suggest that a spatialization of geographical territories also spatializes identities. This becomes especially important in the context of travel-based food shows on 'mainstream' television that create 'exciting' virtual spaces out of actual 'non-mainstream' regions for consumption. Regional television may be proposed to be closer to how Bonnemaison understands territory, which then makes a significant case for the need for more localised regional television which allows for spatialization of the region without exoticisation.

This then brings to fore the question of whether regional television in India holds potential to be the much required space of resistance and contestation, which allows for the production of contextualized, decommodified virtual spaces by the region and for the region. Can regional television allow for greater 'authenticity' of representation by virtue of its linguistic and/or geographical proximity to the physical territory? And thus, does it hold potential to reverse the exotic gaze of national television[11] with which it represents regional spaces?

The responses to the above questions range from positive to negative depending on who within the region has access to content production and dissemination. As discussed briefly earlier, one observes a definite augmentation of regional channels in the last decade, mainly based on languages officially recognized by the State. And indeed, the cracking hold of a 'national' sentiment and western programming has reduced within this time. Some years ago, a *Khadya Bhramanti* was nowhere on the television map in terms of its viewership as opposed to a *Khana Khazana* or *Chakh le India* (both telecast on Hindi and 'Hinglish' channels). One could propose that there has been a relative downfall of English and Hindi as the only languages of television, as the audience's interest in regional television has risen.

An example of the actualization of a sub-regional space on television may be cited in news channels T News, V6 and Raj TV which claim to provide news and content related to the Telangana region. The need for a channel that caters not only to the larger political state of

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[11] 'National' is defined in terms of the majority in this case, which largely represents the upper caste, upper class, Hindu, able-bodied and male perspective. Anything located outside this perspective must attune itself to the hegemonic definition of the 'national', failing which it is termed as 'anti-national' or 'non-national'. National Television here refers to television channels and other television production entities that use programming techniques to generate and broadcast content that produces and upholds this 'national' sentiment.

Andhra Pradesh, but also to specific regions may be linked to the sub-regional unrest within the state. A brief overview of the issues brought out by the Telangana movement brings to light the exploitation of the region by more affluent sections of the state. The power of the television to visibilise issues has been effectively harnessed by some channels such as T News, as they create a space for expression of concerns by supporters of the Telangana movement through a localised perspective and use of a language largely considered as 'non-standard' Telugu. Whether or not the T-News channel has actually managed to achieve the status of 'Heartbeat of Telangana' as per its tagline is subject to discussion. However, the very existence of such channels reflects a possible decentralization in media ownership and a step away from the mainstreaming of public opinion and discussion on the yet to be formed state of Telangana.

However, the complexities with the regional may be furthered with a discussion on its interaction with the phenomenon of format peddling by national and international media corporations. It is observed that a particular sold format such as Indian Idol or Master Chef India remains rigid and maintains a striking similarity between shows across countries. Moreover, shows unconnected to corporate formats are perceived by the audience to adopt stylistic treatments of many shows. One observes, thus, that the international is followed by the national, which in turn is followed by the regional. A look at the views of respondents U10 and U9 suggests the complex nature of this phenomenon;

> *Honestly, I feel NDTV Good Times too pretentious. It's like they're always trying too hard to be TLC.* -Respondent U10

I think TLC anchors are as good as the anchors of NDTV Good Times. But by virtue of them being Indian, I associate more with them, so I like watching the channel more. I wouldn't really watch a Bengali channel though. -Respondent U9

It is possible that sold formats tend to homogenize television content. However, the analysis would be incomplete without taking into account the agency and localised nature of the audience. Not all copied versions of originally conceived and sold formats actually work. While formats on television do give a similar look and feel to shows across national boundaries, they also get influenced by the culture to which the viewers belong, thereby rendering each version of the same show different. The 'resilience' of national and local cultures to international formats produced verbatim pose a challenge to the media industry, which it deals with through a slight tweaking of largely rigid formats. Thus, each entity shapes the other; local and national cultures play an important role in moulding formats, which renders the claim that television and food formats most necessarily damage cultural diversity, contestable.

As discussed earlier, food shows on regional television have not been in resonance with the spate of travel-based shows on national and international television. Regional television continues to air essentially studio-based food shows, where an attempt to travel is made only on certain days or particular segments of food shows. In the case of Marathi television in particular, *Khadya Bhramanti* on ETV Marathi remains one of the first ever travel-based food shows to cover culinary experiences of new areas within Maharashtra by visiting participants' homes and nearby tourist destinations. The format of the show is an uncanny combination of static and dynamic in its approach to travel. An episode on Kolhapur, for example, would include the exploration of

recipes entirely through participants. The anchor acts as a medium between the audience and the participant rather than showing his/her own take on local recipes. The method of virtual travel within regional television would, in fact, be viewed as 'clinical' by those attuned to 'exploration-based' shows.

Through the process of the study, respondents admitted to be more regular watchers of *Aamhi Saare Khavayye* on Zee Marathi than *Khadya Bhramanti*. It must be added that a show such as *Aamhi Saare Khavayye* propagates consumption of new ingredients and products found in the market through some of its segments. It is important to note however, that these episodes are mostly those anchored by Chef Nilesh Limaye, who is understood to have 'expert' knowledge. However, episodes which include audience participation tend to experiment with locally available ingredients much more, indicating the tendency to adapt the 'authentic' to local palates. Indeed, the larger the participation of the audience on television, the greater is its agency to change and adapt what it sees on television. The audience often associates with participants much more than the chef or culinary expert who possesses superior knowledge. Respondent U9 explains her discomfort with the chef in a cookery show;

> ... *A chef is like a teacher teaching you. It gets boring. When you do it yourself, you are more interested in it. With participants in a food show one can identify oneself with them. Like if I had been there, I would have also done it like this.*

Thus, a differentiation between culinary knowledge is made through the differentiation of the expert from the lay. The expert's superior knowledge is both enticing and intimidating and

attempts are made to make the culinary expert accessible through various modes of consumption. Ketchum (2005) talking about celebrity chefs and culinary experts says,

> …You might not be able to interact with (them), but you can use the products they endorse, or recipes they offer, and form a connection to them... The network is then able to capitalize on the public's interest in food through creating new types of food programming that invite viewers to buy products to bridge the gap between fantasy and reality (Ketchum, 2005; 231- 232).

Similar is the case of food products launched by food experts Sanjeev Kapoor, Karen Anand and Tarla Dalal through their wide range of cooking sauces, pickles and chutneys. For the affluent that can afford and choose to buy these extensions of expert knowledge, 'authenticity' of cuisines remains superior. The 'lay', on the other hand, is an entity from within the audience, and often endorses the adaptation of cuisines to familiar tastes, ingredients and techniques. Respondent R1 agrees,

> *I would love to try new things out as well. But one can't manage buying everything every time. So when I try out new dishes, I change things to suit our taste and pocket. And I like how these shows have people like us cooking on TV. Because they also use whatever they have like I do.*

Both, regional and national television, tend to include the lay and the expert at various points in their content, depending upon the final aim. The ability of regional television to include more of the audience lies perhaps, in the greater proximity to geographical territory and community, which consequently lends a greater context to the representation. However, the presence of

members of the audience as participants allow for a certain level of democratization of cookery on television. While the expert promotes consumption, 'lay' cooks on television share their 'own way' - localized knowledge and experience that is unique to them and perhaps, their families. The knowledge is shared with the audience as an equal, even while participants often follows similar rituals of performance to appear chef-like while cooking. Interestingly, the affluent consumer supports the claim that 'authenticity' lies in the regional. The consumption of most travel-based shows is not without the criticism that a greater involvement of and agency in the hands of the community would make virtual travel a more 'authentic' experience. Respondent U2 explains,

It was him (Aditya Bal) eating all the while... it was never somebody from the region telling him about the food. So that beats the purpose and the element of exploring doesn't come.

Referring to Aditya Bal's interaction with the Dhangar community she adds,

... When you serve food to people they generally sit and eat. These guys are made to stand and eat that Malwani chicken curry, so the whole thing seems rigged.

At this point, it would be crucial to note that there exists a hierarchy of sub-regions even within regional shows. The anchor of *Aamhi Saare Khavayye*, produced in Mumbai, speaks dominant brahmanical Marathi rather than particular dialects and uses references identifiable by a potential consumer. Thus, representation on regional television also depends on the patterns of sub-regional dominance and resistance as the creators of knowledge tend to remain the dominant few with access to education and technology. The regional is not removed from the unsaid hierarchy within television content where intra-regional interests are pitted against one another. In fact, one

still awaits the recognition of the subtle politics of language and cultural dominance within regional television. Nevertheless, this danger still lends greater possibility of contextualized representation to regional television.

Conclusion

This paper has tried to make a case for regional television as democratic and possibly resistant to the long-standing national television. The fragmented and diverse nature of the regional and the lack of a grand narrative of identity allows for individuals and communities to remain embedded within their contexts. The same, however, remains elusive in the case of national television due to the production of a wide amount of 'nationalistic' media texts over time. The survival of sub-regional television, thus, only needs widespread access to technology which would allow a region to represent itself as diverse and dynamic. One could propose then, that regional participation, whether through 'participants' in shows or production teams, holds greater potential for diverse narratives to come up. The possibility of multiple narratives is crucial to an exploration of food cultures at a more equal level, since the very basic essence of a cuisine lies in its context.

Regional television does have the capacity to rightful, powerful space as proposed by Lefebvre, which possesses potential to translate into a greater access to social space by communities embedded within the regional and sub-regional. There are, at present, several barriers to the access of technology by certain sections. However, the power to create regional and sub-regional space lies much more with regional television than national or international. The problems of

national and regional hegemony and the associated problems of exoticised representation may be overcome through a decentralization of television content, which is possible through the decentralization of access to technology and knowledge. It is only through a redefinition of 'authenticity' as fragmented and fluid, and the legitimization of each individual experience of cuisine that barriers between 'expert' and 'lay', 'mainstream' and 'non-mainstream' can be broken.

Bio-note

Shweta Ghosh is a documentary filmmaker and researcher. A silver medalist from the School of Media and Cultural Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, she has explored her interest in food, travel, television and disability through research and film projects. Her research paper 'Performing Food' traces changes, continuities and disjuncts in urban, middle class cooking in Pune, India, and has been published in an international peer reviewed journal. Her documentary films *Breakin' Mumbai* and *Accsex* have been selected for screening in prestigious film festivals across India and abroad. Shweta is currently working on a film that explores oral histories of cuisine and food culture in Malwan region in Maharashtra, India.

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