We Are What We Eat In
A House for Mr Biswas and the Inheritance of Loss[1]

Najma Saher
Government Home Economics College
Pirpai, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan
&
Shazia Sadaf
Department of English & Applied Linguistics
University of Peshawar, Peshawar, Pakistan

Abstract

In *The Inheritance of Loss and A House for Mr. Biswas*, food might be recognized as an all-important metaphor for self-identification. Food is loaded with meaning about relations, communion, home and identity. In the said texts, food becomes a powerful voice for an emptiness which lives on as a physical craving and a continual sense of discomfort. Identity seems to become physical and instinctive when it comes to food. Interestingly in the postcolonial moment, food appears to lose its capacity for gratification and either acts as a catalyst for evoking disappointment, or a metaphor for self-estrangement that is usually experienced by the displaced subject. This paper aims to show the effects of colonization on the characters' eating habits and their struggle at dining table and around kitchen. The native is lured into preferring western food over local cuisine so as to cover his colonial inadequacy but most often get deprived of the food that has been satisfying both to his palate and his stomach.

Keywords: Food; Identity; Taste; Eating; Gratification; Discomfort; Home; Selfhood

Introduction

Food does not only satisfy the stomach but also provides a sense of fulfillment and is nourishing to selfhood. This relationship between food and identity is difficult to ignore for Ray (2004), Belasco (2008) and Counihan (1997). Food has some occult power in it and "is more than an amalgam of biochemical nutrients. What we eat has enormous significance as a medium for personal recollection and collective identity."[2] Anthropologist Sidney W. Mintz maintains that "eating is never a 'purely biological' activity ---- nor is the food ever simply eaten: its consumption is always conditioned by meaning" (*Tasting Food* 7).[3] There is little to doubt that "what we eat, when we eat, where we eat, and with whom we eat all reveal something about ourselves."[4] Perhaps, "food and eating are central to our subjectivity, or sense of self."[5] In postcolonial narratives, food takes on a new resonance highlighting loss, absence and displacement. The two novels in their

engagement with colonial practices, underpin an interesting interplay of food and identities around the characters' appetites and choices of meals.

The protagonists in *The Inheritance of Loss* and *A House for Mr. Biswas* as well as other characters find their sensibilities strained in a world in which little room is left for tradition due to the ever-increasing pressure from western trends. They appear to wage their most severe emotional battles in the realm of food. The judge, Lola, Noni and Sai in *The Inheritance of Loss* seem to emerge as a group who are Asian in blood but English in taste. Specific colonial dynamics may be traced around kitchen and dining table, as the characters doggedly trail western food and cookery at the expense of their own comfort, relationships and social bonds. On the other hand, in *A House for Mr. Biswas*, Biswas shows a stern colonial attitude towards food. He is one of those who "don't always want to eat 'what [they] are'".[6] My contention is that in *The Inheritance of Loss and A House for Mr. Biswas*, food offers interesting ways of manipulating, adopting and disclaiming identities and stands as the most potent metaphor for the crisis of self-representation. The characters remain ambivalent and confused about who they are while struggling to take to foreign food and eating mannerisms. They appear to be in a negative relationship not just with food but with themselves.

The poor colonial figure after turning his back on home-made food appears to lose his sense of security, usually associated with a mother. The judge goes astray at the point when he throws out his mother's food and thus, kicks out his Indian identity once and for all. He does not want to be called an Indian and the first thing he does is to disown his mother's food.[7]. At this point, the judge severs love bonds and familial relations. The allusion is significant as it was a choice of food that made Adam and Eve lose paradise. The judge kicks out the "extravagance" of Indian food but soon starts missing his mother's *choorva*. He could not then realize just how reckless this act could be, as no food in the world can compete with the comfort of a mother's food. The food he has had at home was pure, delicious and healthy. It made him feel special and fulfilled.[8]

In contrast, the scanty "breakfast" offered for dinner to the judge by his landlady comes as the first setback in losing home[9] (IL, p. 59). He gathers up courage to request a proper dinner and the scene is reminiscent of Oliver Twist.[10] Never before would the judge have experienced such feelings of timidity and helplessness. The judge is chastised and held up to ridicule for eating curry. These days, "curry" has become a symbol of a multicultural society and is widely served not only in Indian but in western restaurants all over the world; yet the judge had to disown and disclaim it straight away when in England. The girls, "held their noses and giggled at him, 'Phew he stinks of curry!'" (IL 39). The very reasons which once made Europeans hungry to explore South Asian lands

were later on, to be used against natives as the relationship between the two turned contingent and colonial.

Losing control over the quality and quantity of what he wished to eat proves to be the first crack in a wholesome self for the judge. His stomach, which used to be "full of cream," remains half-empty and craves for full, rich Indian meals. However, under the new pressures, he gets used to neglecting the needs of his body and soul. Pushed into a quagmire of confusion, he starts to misinterpret his own gut feelings. Once back home, he finds "he [is] a foreigner--- *a foreigner*--- every bit of him [screams]. Only his digestion [dissents] and [tells] him he [is] home". But still he mistakes himself for a foreigner and his good digestion as "*Western transportation*" (IL 166,167). Probably, the metamorphosis that he keeps imagining for himself could never occur. He continues to see himself as "*Western transportation"* and does not let his inner person, for which his stomach speaks, take control of this estranged self.

On the way to assimilation, he forces his cravings in a way similar to the abrupt adjustment usually made by foreigners in their manners of dress. Very soon, despite an Indian Hindu, he starts to eat Shepherd's pie in England (IL, p. 119). Perhaps, he tries to improve his relations with the master and fight his sense of inferiority through food. Whenever he senses racism in the air or that he may be targeted by street children, he holds out a pork pie in his hand as a symbol of his changed loyalties or as an olive branch. But the pork pie simply symbolizes his cowardice as he cannot react or call for help when bullying children openly humiliate him, knock down and start pissing on another Indian boy in front of his eyes. He just "[turns] and [flees]" back to his "rented" room with the pie still in his hand (IL 209).

The first scene in *The Inheritance of Loss* opens with the judge's unreasonable demands for afternoon tea, to be served in an English manner with freshly baked confectionery. As a colonial practice, he wants to celebrate his teatime and demands a cake or at least some "macaroons" or "scones" or "cheese straws" (IL 3).[11] On eating "chocolate pudding" which has been warmed "in a frying pan" on wood fire, his face takes on "an expression of grudging pudding contentment" (IL 3, 4). He pesters his cook for English snacks but then has to cook *pakoras* (local deep-fried snacks) for the intruders as there is no stock of English groceries in his home. It may suggest the miseries faced by westernized natives in keeping up an artificial lifestyle in indigenous surroundings. Ridiculously, the judge expects his cook to bake cookies, cakes, and make puddings on a wood fire when there is no gas or electricity in the house. This may also be the reason that the judge remains grumpy while waiting for the impossible to happen. He is never satisfied with how his native cook serves him, no matter how much he tries to

please him with soups, mashed potatoes, baked snacks and deserts instead of local rice and daal.

The judge is probably resentful as he knows at heart it is all pretense, no matter how much his cook struggles to serve him continental food by keeping and reusing scraps of aluminum foil (IL 33), warding off ants and vermin by putting water into four bowls for the legs of the food cupboard to stand in (IL 113) and burning damp wood (IL 1). He never utters a word of praise either for the prepared food or for the poor, hardworking cook. The hoax of juggling English civilization with a frugal, retired life is spelled out at the fussy tea-times when "Marie and Delite biscuits" have to be served with the teapot and cups, "upon the tray" (IL 3). The tea that is served to him with dirty saucers, a sticky sugar pot and hard, local biscuits is "a travesty and it [undoes] the very concept of [English] teatime." This "travesty" nonetheless, is what defines him.

Around the kitchen and at the dining table, the judge's life appears to be a comic-tragic episode. Inviting someone to dinner or to lunch is as a gesture of friendship and goodwill. The judge remains ill at ease at the only dinner to which he has reluctantly invited his friend, Bose. Strangely, the judge loses his appetite on seeing the portrait of Gandhi in the restaurant replacing that of the Queen of England (IL 203). Even the dinner with Gyan is used as an opportunity by the judge to show him to be an inferior native and make him feel unworthy. His awkward table manners are scrutinised according to English standards, with a total disregard for his presence as a guest. The judge distastefully notices that he is unfamiliar and hesitant with the cutlery and the English food, "and an old emotion [comes] back to the judge, a recognition of weakness that [is] not merely a feeling, but also a taste, like fever. He [can] tell Gyan [has] never eaten such food in such a manner and "bitterness [floods] the judge's mouth" (IL, p. 109).

Gyan is unbearable for him as he seems to remind the judge of his own embarrassment and acute inferiority while eating with English people. He appears to have lost his ability to socialize even over meals and criticizes Gyan for what he himself is but covers with Western garb. Nonetheless, the judge himself feels vulnerable while eating with others. In an Indian setting, it is the judge who is an outsider as he eats "meat chops" in an unusual and non-native manner. He picks up a bit of meat with his fork, "dunks it in the gravy" and piles it on a bit of potato. Then he mashes on a few peas over it and pushes the whole thing into his mouth, "with the fork held in his left hand" (IL 109). When the judge looks "irritably across the chops at Gyan", the "chops" appear to be a barrier between him and Indian vegetarians (IL 109). He sits removed at the dining table with his prejudice, without any acknowledgement of the food or the people eating with him. Moreover, the stored empty wine bottles (IL 7) seem to

be a personal reminder that he is the one who eats and drinks like Westerners. The meals are laid out on a dining table and eaten with a fork and a knife, yet fail to evoke domestic bliss.

Caught in a colonial past, the judge seems to be out of place and time. He takes bed tea in a country where the native servants call it "baad tea." Even in a tent on his professional tours, he would keep up pretensions and eat burned toast, "toasted upon the flame," and spread "marmalade over the burn" (IL 61). His meals are to be served at an accurate clock time and he makes sure to have his dinner in a black dinner jacket with a bow tie even when his posting is in a jungle (IL60). To serve him an English roast, the servant has to follow a strict regime.

Eating "roast bastard" appears to be a test of the judge's authenticity as is illustrated in the paragraph below.[12] In absolute "mimicry", he seems to have fallen prey to self-contempt, illustrating that there is no fool like an old fool. He feels as "if he [is] eating himself" no matter how much he tries to shove the unpleasant reality along with the "roast bastard" down his throat. Though he wants to become an absolute master, he surprisingly finds himself again to be a victim. He easily loses control on finding a hair of his Indian wife in the bowl of "cream of mushroom soup"; even more so because it is a strand of Indian dark hair and turns the high seriousness of keeping up appearances into a burlesque (IL172). However, on his return journey from England, he is seen to be sipping "beef tea" and yet, sitting at a distance from the white man (IL 119).

Later, in retired life, the judge could easily have reverted to healthy eating after risking his health and peace of mind in his earlier life. The vegetables that are grown in his garden and which he starts using only in the time of trouble (IL281) should have been his first preference. Instead of fattening chocolate puddings, cheese straws, macaroons and "roast bustard[s]", the local vegetables would have been a much more healthy and nutritious option for him and something he might have enjoyed in their first freshness. As an Indian, he may have found western food insipid but seems to sacrifice his taste buds in order to continue with his bland taste for everything other than Englishness itself.

On the other hand, in *A House for Mr. Biswas*, the Hanuman House food is used as a means of power and politicized housekeeping. Ellen McWilliams is of the opinion that complex politics underlie food and eating and its representation in literature. She maintains that "feeding is established psychologically as the locus of love, aggression, pleasure, anxiety, frustration and desire for control; precisely, in other words, the ingredients for power relations."[13] In the East, food is supposed to bind one's loyalties to the host and "food refusal (---) is denial of relation".[14] Biswas does not tend to show any respect for his in-laws' food as he

may not want to subscribe any loyalty to them, as the principle is that "a man does not eat with his enemy" (Mauss, 1967: 55).[15] After a good fight with his in-laws, he orders Shama, "go and get me a tin of salmon. Canadian. And get some bread and pepper sauce".[16] He then throws home-cooked rice and lentils out of the window. At "eating sessions" Biswas is ready to "take his revenge on the Tulsis" (MB105). Perhaps he wants to reclaim his autonomy and manhood by spitting into the food that they provide. Power politics seem to underpin his denial of food, as "refusal of food produced and given by others is (---) a refusal to be beholden."[17] But he does not understand that ultimately he remains "beholden" as a colonial consumer to "Ovaltine" and English supplements.

It is food that seems to cause disputes, and also influences Biswas's relationship with his wife and in-laws; "'rice, potatoes all that damn starch'. He [taps] his belly. 'You want to blow me up?'" (MB135). Biswas considers potatoes and rice as an inferior diet, which is regularly served to him, different from the special "brain-feeding meals, of fish in particular" that is set aside for his brothers-in-law (MB106). The typical everyday food consumed each single day appears to add to his hatred for Hanuman House. He prefers salmon but that is offered "only on Good Friday" (MB142). It is respect rather than some special food which he wants as he knows this is seriously lacking, as he is fed by his in-laws. He may feel starved of self-integrity while gulping down his meals and conveniently starts criticizing the food to make himself appear superior and one with western tastes.

In conservative world, food speaks for class and gender. It has been used to privilege men at the expense of woman's basic nutrition. In Hanuman House "the best of the food [is] automatically set aside for [the boys] and they [are] given special brain-feeding meals, of fish in particular" (MB106). The daughters are complicit in this house rule, but for Biswas, if not for the other sons-in-law, it is an outright humiliation and something that he cannot bear. This discrimination with food seems to trigger Biswas's hatred towards his brothers-in-law. The poor man is not able to see that beggars cannot be choosers. He stands colonized by insufficiency of resources and is no different from the "subaltern" spoken of by Spivak.[18] It seems it is the scarcity of food that makes one "subaltern".

What—and how—we eat, signify different things from table to table and have strong social and symbolic significance. Unsurprisingly, as a colonial subject, Biswas is a lonely eater and does not take joy from eating together with his wife or family. This kind of "self-denial of food and refusal to eat with others represents a severe rupture of connection."[19] Though he finds the meals from Tara satisfying, notwithstanding, even there, he eats alone. Moreover, eating

seems to serve as a metaphor for the breathing space which has been denied to a colonial subject:

> The barrack yard, with its mud, animal droppings and the quick slime on stale puddles, gave him nausea, especially when he was eating fish or Shama's pancakes. He took to eating at the green table in the room, hidden from the front door, his back to the side of window (---) as he ate he read the newspapers on the wall (MB 218).

At the time of eating, Biswas's hatred for colonial surroundings turns to nausea and seems to contaminate his instincts for tradition. His state is so pitiful that he has to read English newspapers to wash down his food and still finds the eating stressful.

Dissatisfaction with food is a trope of Biswas's displacement. Surprisingly, he finds his mother's tea that is "lukewarm, with too little tea, too much milk and a taste of wood-smoke" unwelcoming, especially when she adds, "he needn't drink it" (MB199). The disappointment with his mother's tea is a good reflection of his insecurity and discomfort around identity. However, he enjoys meals at Tara's and Ajodha's house and perhaps, the good meals help him fight his demons of low self-esteem (MB 254). The "unadulterated" dream of his youth was that "when he [becomes] a man it would be possible for him to enjoy everything the way Ajodha did, and he [promises] himself to buy a rocking chair and to drink a glass of hot milk in the evenings" (MB 196). But in adult life, he seems to misunderstand his gut feelings. He misinterprets his needs and starts overfeeding himself imported supplements. His search for western brands reveals his discontented soul more than his poor health. He keeps on mixing and drinking "Sanatogen", "tablespoonfuls of Ferrol and in the evenings, glasses of Ovaltine" (MB 315) instead of grabbing "a hot glass of (fresh) milk" which would have satisfied his dreams, nourished his body more economically as well as soothed his nerves.

Biswas's under-nourished body corresponds to his colonial self-image. Malnutrition has given Biswas "the shallowest of chests, the thinnest of limbs; it [has] stunted his growth and [has given] him a soft rising belly" (MB 18). He may also find it difficult to deal with the collective memory of an under-fed slave, especially with the Caribbean history of indentured labour. His weak body, "soft calves" (142) and his overall health remain his main concern. He used to read out an American column *That Body of Yours* to Ajodha which "[deals] every day with a different danger to the human body." Though he wants to break with the Trinidadian food stereotypes and poor standards of living, he overlooks the

secret of Ajodha's health and contentment. Though "Ajodha [listens] with gravity, concern, alarm" (MB 48) to the informative column, he keeps himself fit through a regular intake of fresh milk and good home-made meals. Contrarily, Biswas relies on popular brands of food supplements and drinks. Nonetheless, reading from *That Body of Yours* is a privilege for him, as his community in general cannot afford health concerns. It is possible that this is where he has picked up his anxiety about his physical condition.

As the most potent voice of identity, a colonial subject may find his actual cravings difficult to suppress or deal with. Biswas hates fish as it is a Trinidadian product, but then he is not able to substitute it with something that he likes. His occasional experimentation with food is neither acceptable to his stomach nor to his soul (MB 144) as "one's stomach is one's ancestor--- it rumbles like a lion, refusing to be ignored."[20] His failures and estrangements might be demonstrated in his chaotic way of eating and in the way his stomach reacts. Once he rebelled from rice and curry but was still not sure what else could be palatable. First, he ate oysters from a shop but "the raw, fresh smell of oysters was now upsetting him. His stomach was full and heavy, but unsatisfied. The pepper sauce had blistered his lips. Then the pains began" (MB 143). Next, he stuffed "salmon" and "shop bread" into a full "distressed" stomach.[21] In his fight against everything that is local, he keeps harming himself.

The frustration which is usually felt by Biswas after experimental "secret eating" is perhaps, caused due to the lack of self-knowledge. It is quite probable that an over-fed western identity turns Biswas's stomach more than anything else. His colonial aspirations conflict with the needs of his body and cause him mental and physical "distress". In his case, "food as an access point creates an awareness of the estranged position [he finds himself] in and the incompleteness of [his] cultural memory. Instead of feeding a hunger [for identity], it exposes a void."[22] The eating disorders seem to project Biswas's colonial ambivalence and insecurity as "psychological disorders are expressed through eating."[23] It is possible that he suffers from food anxiety symptomized by severe stomach pains, nausea and "diminished appetite" of which he suffers (MB 154). His food anxiety seems related to his emotional detachment, un-relatedness, dependency and feelings of worthlessness situating identity-loss as a multi-determined disorder.[24]

To stomach the foreign, stuffed-in identity may have been daunting and regardless of what he forces into his body, he continues to feel empty and dissatisfied. For adopting newer food habits, Biswas needs ascetic measures and not the duplicity of diasporic practices. Regardless of his anger and frustration, his body is comfortable with the simple, home-cooked food of Hanuman House while the restaurant food simply upsets his stomach. It seems pointless for him to

stuff the secret hole in his identity with stale "shop bread". He may also find some liberation in food, as it offers him quite a few choices in contrast to the limited prospects of living on a far-off island. He tends to use food as an escape from his oppressive diasporic life, but is left feeling sick and guilty.

In his preference for English supplements and medicines, Biswas chases colonial myths without deriving any benefit from them. Through "Ovaltine", Biswas wants to secure a better future for his children than that of other Trinidadians. It is thoughtless of him to buy Ovaltine to improve his children's minds when he cannot otherwise nourish his family. He has told his children "to keep the milk and the prunes secret, lest Owad [their cousin] should hear of it and laugh at them for their presumptuousness" (MB 378). Perhaps, he wants to cure the troubling sense of ancestral inferiority by injecting English supplements into a new generation. When Shama tells him that her family believes that fish brains are good for the human brain, he bursts out that "[her] family just eat too much damn fish brains" (MB 193). He hates fish and condensed milk, which is served to children in Hanuman House. For him it is only English brands which promise health and good mental performance. He appears to be under the impression that it is food that has made the colonizer intellectually superior to him. It may have been a thorough internalization of how the ex-colonized has always been seen by the Other.[25]However, the depraved subject must start trusting his own circumstances and not to confuse indigenous value with Western brands and labels. Respecting the local food may be the first step towards gaining self-esteem.

II

In relation to Sai in *The Inheritance of Loss*, food may be acknowledged as a metaphor for class differences and prejudices that replicate colonial order. Her western food habits seem to have ruined her chance to find love. She is also a foreigner in her own country as she can't follow traditional cooking nor indigenous customs of serving guests. As the robbers demand a drink, Sai with shaking hands, "stews tea in a pan and strains it" and has no idea how to make the local tea, as she can only brew English tea (IL 6). In the convent, she is introduced to a new religion through food and is led to see that "cake [is] better than *laddoos,* fork spoon knife better than hands, sipping the blood of Christ and consuming a wafer of his body was more civilized than garlanding a phallic symbol with marigolds" (IL 30). The cook intuitively knows what Sai might prefer to eat and he welcomes her with a mashed potato car on her arrival, a skill that has come down to him from his ancestors who served the British, and which he still finds useful to satisfy his westernized masters.

Eating habits are important for Sai's family to mark out their difference from locals. Sai is proudly raised by her grandfather on his principles. The judge who "[eats] even his chapattis, his puris and *parathas,* with knife and fork [insists] that Sai in his presence, does the same" (IL 176). Perhaps, the upper middle class deem themselves superior to the poor while they eat with "knife and fork" and not with their hands. Gyan finds Sai's identity— "she who [cannot] not eat with her hands"—daunting once he pulls himself away from her. Their relationship was possibly destined to fail as they could not eat together, no matter how close they had been. While "eating together they [have] always felt embarrassed ---- he, unsettled by her finickiness and her curbed enjoyment, and, she, revolted by his energy and his fingers working the dal, his slurps and smacks" (IL 176). Even for a so-called nationalist, her food habits are equivalent to betrayal. It may be seen as treacherous for Gyan that she "never chewed a *paan* and [has] not tried most sweets in the *mithaishop,* for they [make] her retch. . . [feels] happier with so-called English vegetables, snap peas, French beans, spring onions and feared—*feared—loki, tinda,kathal, kaddu, patrel,* and the local *saag* in the market" (IL 176).

It is difficult for Gyan to understand that Sai is not westernized by choice but is born into an educated family, under the command of a Cambridge qualified grandfather. When Gyan calls her "*Kishmish",* she calls him "*Kaju"* in their exchange of nick names and does not use any western salutations such as "sweetheart" or "darling" or "love" for him (IL 140). However, the contrasting food preferences remain an issue. He is ashamed of the English snacks that he has eaten in her company once he has joined a nationalist group. For him the memory is quite embarrassing, as now "it [is] a masculine atmosphere and Gyan [feels] a moment of shame remembering his tea parties with Sai on the veranda, the cheese toast, queen cakes from the baker" (IL 161). Nonetheless, Sai is ostracized for the food she has generously and courteously offered to him as her tutor and as her guest.

Neither Lola nor Noni are aware of the costs and consequences of what they eat. They try to act as bohemians but in essence their English supplies are a display of colonial hunger. Lola exaggeratedly describes English "strawberries and cream" after her recent visit to England (IL 46). Even Noni finds her exultations and exhortations ridiculous and tells her plainly that she can get strawberries and cream in her hometown too. It seems that for them it is food that keeps them under the illusion that they are superior to the deprived masses. They make sure not to run out of the imported food stuffs they need for their dining table. Perhaps, a hoax is sustained by showcasing an empty "jam jar on the sideboard" in the dining room that says "by appointment to Her Majesty the queen" inscribed "in gold under a coat of arms" along with "a crowned lion and a

unicorn" (IL 44). To look after the English "broccoli patch" and make pear stew and wine in their house seems to be their main preoccupation while they keep bringing over "Marmite", "Oxo bouillon cubes", "Knorr soup packets" and "After Eights" in their suitcases probably, more to feast their colonial hunger rather than for the taste (IL 46). They watch English TV programmes that show "gentlemen" whose faces look like "moist, contented hams" (IL 45) in order to make themselves imagine sharing their contentment and plenitude against an air of social and political unrest, in which in reality, they had to breathe. Importing "seeds" to grow "the country's only broccoli" (IL 44) is symbolic of their efforts to preserve English heritage and to overlook their own roots. Their food indulgences have made a spectacle of their lifestyle and exposed them to many a threat in "a rice and dal country."[26] It is the poignant smell of mutton being cooked that attracts the starving nationalists to climb through their kitchen window. The sight of "intestinal-looking Essex Farm sausages, frozen salami with a furze of permafrost melting away" is irresistible to the rebel fighters and they forcibly start eating to their heart's content in the kitchen (IL 238, 239). The sisters are made to pay for their food extravagances. Even the judge has to pay a price for keeping a dining table at the centre of his house, and is ordered by the robbers to "prepare the table" for them with his own hands (IL 6). The disadvantaged ones appear to feel avenged to some degree by eating at the dining table in a westernized home. However, when there is the temptation of good food, identity or any other cause may be easily thrown away.

The sisters know that "chicken tikka masala" is gaining popularity over fish and chips in Britain (IL 46) but still fail to enjoy their own food. They do not seem to understand that spicy food is in greater demand in the markets of Europe and trans-Atlantic countries. Vegetarian and halal food needs are difficult to ignore by businesses competing in the international food market. A newly evolved spicy and vegetarian food culture is in return "handicapping" the western market. It seems that the "civilizing mission"[27] that Ashish Nandy once referred to, has started to take its toll on the colonizer. "Chicken masala", "chicken tandoori", "kebabs" and "doners" seem to be on restaurant menus as well as on the shelves of the supermarkets across the Western world. Krishnendu Ray observes that "the local and provincial penetrates the global and reconstitutes the latter. It brings the Orient home and in the process, disorients the Occident. It is not a very assertive reorientation yet, but a slow, seeping corruption of Anglo-Saxon conceptions of the world."[28] However, a colonial subject still feels displaced in the realm of food.

With his acquired eating habits, he may neither enjoy his own food in its purity nor the Western burgers and pizzas. He remains unfulfilled after replacing homemade food with the fast food in search for westernization and modernity.

But to follow the English food culture is an anachronism in itself, as the West has taken to spicy food and curry. Therefore, it seems that the colonial food habits of Lola, Noni, Sai and the judge instead of modernizing them, have pushed them back into past. Their blunted tastes make them stand out as living archives. Even Biswas seems unaware of the new trends in food industry across the western world. He listens to what his colonized self-dictates him, not to his inner voice and therefore never comes home.

Notes

[1]This paper is from my unpublished PhD work I completed under the supervision of Dr. Shazia Sadaf, and submitted to the University of Peshawar.

[2]Roland Barthes, "Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption", *Food and Culture: A Reader,* Carole M. Counihan and Penny Van Esterik (eds.) (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 26

[3]Ya-Hi Irenna Chang, "Food Consumption and the Troubled Self in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior,* Alice Walker's *The Color Purple,* Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club,* and Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine",* *How What You Eat Defines Who You Are: The Food Theme in Four American Writers* (UK: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2008), p. 11.

[4]Ibid.p. 12.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Warren Belasco, "Identity: Are we what we eat", *Food: The Key Concepts* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2008), p. 34.

[7]He "[picks] up the package, [flees] to the deck, and [throws] it overboard. [Doesn't] his mother think of the inappropriateness of her gesture? Undignified love, Indian love, stinking love, unaesthetic love------- the masters of the ocean could have what she [has] so bravely packed getting upon that predawn mush" (IL, p. 38).

[8]"Fed he was, to surfeit. Each day, he was given a tumbler of fresh milk sequined with golden fat. His mother held the tumbler to his lips, lowering it only when empty, so he reemerged like a whale from the sea, heaving for breath. Stomach full of cream, mind full of study" (IL, p. 58).

[9]Kiran Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), p. 59. All further references will be abbreviated to IL and will be cited in the text.

[10]"After a spate of nights lying awake listening to the borborygms of his half-empty stomach, thinking tearfully of his family in Piphit who thought him as worthy of a hot dinner as the queen of England, Jemubhai worked up the courage to ask for a proper evening meal" (IL, p. 39).

[11]Malar Ghandi, "Tea & Biscuits---Colonial Hangover"; Ghandi suggests that tea and biscuits are a colonial legacy. Retrieved from http://kitchentantras.com/tea-biscuits/ accessed on 17 November, 2014.

[12]"8:00: the cook saved his reputation, cooked a chicken, brought it forth and kept eating feeling as if he were eating himself, since he, too, was (was he?) part of the fun" (IL, p. 63).

[13]Ellen McWilliams, "Margaret Atwood's Canadian Hunger Artist: Postcolonial Appetites in *The Edible Woman", Kunapipi: Journal of Postcolonial Writing & Culture,* Vol. 28, No. 2. (2006), p. 68.

[14]Carole M. Counihan, "An Anthropological view of Western Women's Prodigious Fasting: A Review Essay", *Food and Gender: Identity and Power*, Carole M. Counihan and Steven L. Kaplan (eds.) (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 114.

[15]Carole M. Counihan, "Bread as World: Food Habits and Social Relations in Modernizing Sardinia", *Food and Culture: A Reader,* Carole M. Counihan and Penny Van Esterik (eds.) (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 291.

[16]V. S. Naipaul, *A House for Mr Biswas* (London: Picador, 2003), p. 141. All further references will be abbreviated to MB and will be parenthetically incorporated within the text.

[17]Counihan, "An Anthropological view of Western Women's Prodigious Fasting: A Review Essay", *Food and Gender: Identity and Power,* p. 113.

[18]Spivak says: "but one must nevertheless insist that the colonized subaltern *subject* is irretrievably heterogeneous" (26). The description of Spivak's subaltern seems to take all into its fold. The postcolonized subject does not have the resources to stand up for himself and this commonality is shared by all subalterns despite their heterogeneous backgrounds. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak", *The Postcolonial Studies Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995).

[19]Counihan, "An Anthropological View of Western Women's Prodigious

[20]Dr Asha Choubey, "Food as metaphor in Jhumpa Lahiri's Interpreter of Maladies", The Literature and Culture of the Indian Subcontinent (South Asia) in the Postcolonial Web: Retrieved from http://www.Postcolonialweb.org/india/literature/lahiri/choubey1.html Accessed on 26-6-2014.

[21]"Mr. Biswas bought a tin of salmon and two loaves of bread. The bread looked and smelled stale. He knew that in his present state bread would only bring on nausea, but it gave him some satisfaction that he was breaking one of the Tulsi taboos by eating shop bread, a habit they considered reckless, negroid and unclean. The salmon repelled him; he thought it tasted of tin; he felt compelled to eat to the end. And as he ate, his distress increased. Secret eating never did him any good" (MB, p. 144).

[22]Belasco, "Identity: Are We What We Eat?" p. 32, 33.

[23]Counihan, "An Anthropological View of Western Women's Prodigious Fasting: A Review Essay", *Food and Gender: Identity and Power,* p. 117.

[24]Ibid.

[25]Said has committed himself to a close study of how the self-image of the colonial subject is reflected by western representations; "The European is a close reasoner; his statements of fact are devoid of any ambiguity; he is a natural logician, albeit he may not have studied logic; he is by nature skeptical and

requires proof before he can accept the truth of any proposition; his trained intelligence works like a piece of mechanism. The mind of the Oriental, on the other hand, like his picturesque streets, is eminently wanting in symmetry. His reasoning is the most slipshod description. Although the ancient Arabs acquired in a somewhat higher degree the science of dialectics, their descendants are singularly deficient in the logical faculty. They are often incapable of drawing the most obvious conclusions from any simple premises of which they may admit the truth. Endeavor to elicit a plain statement of facts from any ordinary Egyptian. His explanation will generally be lengthy, and wanting in lucidity. He will probably contradict himself half-a-dozen times before he has finished his story. He will often break down under the mildest process of cross-examination. Orientals or Arabs are thereafter shown to be gullible, "devoid of energy and initiative," much given to "fulsome flattery," intrigue, cunning, and unkindness to animals; Orientals cannot walk on either a road or a pavement (their disordered minds fail to understand what the clever European grasps immediately, that roads and pavements are made for walking); Orientals are inveterate liars, they are "lethargic and suspicious," and in everything oppose the clarity, directness, and nobility of the Anglo-Saxon race" (See Edward Said, *Orientalism,* p.38). I think that this image of weakness has been internalized by the subject and lives on in the colonial collective memory.

[26]"It *did* matter, buying tinned ham roll in a rice and dal country; it *did* matter to live in a big house and sit beside a heater in the evening, even one that sparked and shocked; it *did* matter to fly to London and return with chocolates filled with kirsch; it did matter that others could not" (IL, p. 242).

[27]"Colonialism minus a civilizational mission is no colonialism at all. It handicaps the colonizer much more than it handicaps the colonized" (Nandy, "The Psychology of Colonialism", p. 11). In the domain of food, it is possible that the civilizing mission has started to take its toll.

[28]Krishnendu Ray, "Introduction", *The Migrant's Table: Meals and Memories in Bengali-American Households, (*Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), p. 6.

References

Belasco, W. (2008). *Food*: *The Key Concepts.* Oxford & New York: Berg.

Counihan, C. & Kaplan, S.L. (2004). *Food and Gender: Identity and Power*. Eds. London and New York: Routledge.

Counihan, C. & Van Esterik, P. (1997). *Food and Culture*: *A Reader.* Eds. New York and London: Routledge.

Desai, K. (2006). *The Inheritance of Loss*. London: Penguin Books.

Choubey, A. Food as Metaphor in Jumpa Lahiri's Interpreter of Maladies. Retrieved from http://www.postcolonialweb.org/india/literature/lahiri/choubey1.html Accessed on 1-2-2016.

Naipaul, V.S. (2003). *A House for Mr. Biswas.* London: Picador.

Ray, K. (2004). *The Migrant's Table: Meals and Memories in Bengali-American Households.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Said, E. (2001) *Orientalism*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd.

Spivak, G. C. (1996). *The Spivak Reader.* Donna Landry and Gerald Maclean Eds. London and New York: Routledge.

Williams, E. (2006). "Margaret Atwood's Canadian Hunger Artist: Postcolonial Appetites in The Edible Woman." *Kunapipi: Journal of Postcolonial Writing & Culture.* 28 (2). Pp. 63-71.