

Food: A Study of the Effects of its Abundance and Scarcity and related concerns through Selected Works of Indian English Authors

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ABSTRACT: Food, the edible and potable substance, gives life to all living organisms. It is of utmost importance for survival, to every living being across time and place. The type of food we prefer and manage to eat can reveal loads of psychological as well as social information about us. Thus it can be assumed that food, apart from playing the biological function, has a greater and deeper role to play in shaping our identities. However in spite of being such a common and important thing, food has rarely been given the intellectual attention it deserves. Especially in India, which is known for its various cuisines which differ from region to region, as well as for its hungry population, a need arises to study the role food plays both in its presence and its absence. This paper attempts to explore the role food plays in Indian literature as well as in our society and also aims to study the social, psychological and economic concerns related to our lives, which can be decoded and revealed through the theme of food.

KEYWORDS: Food, Scarcity, Abundance, Gender Discrimination, Exploitation

There are basically three primary needs of utmost importance in our everyday life which, as we all have known since our birth, is air, water and food whereas clothing and shelter comes under our secondary needs. Food consists of nourishing and nutritive components such as carbohydrates, fats, proteins, essential minerals and vitamins, which is used as a source of nourishment and can be metabolized by a living being to build tissue and provide energy for the day to day activities of life. Food acts as a stimulus in the life of living beings. It helps us to work, to think, to live our life. Even in the case of some non living things such as electrical appliances and technological gadgets, electricity and fuels work as ‘food’ to run them. Food is even more important than sex, because sexual urge which is required to ensure our genetic continuation needs not be fulfilled every day, but the need of food in order to satisfy our hunger, needs to be fulfilled everyday and that too several times a day.

Food, even though is a very common thing, has not gained the proper attention it deserves. However in the recent times, food has become a very talked about topic and the interest it is gaining is ever-increasing. The recent upsurge of restaurants and food vans in each and every nook and corner of the country can be seen as a proof of how people are interested in trying out new foods and how this business proves to be a profitable one. Now, food is not only limited to

cookbooks anymore but is included in magazines, television shows, movies and so on. There are even entire television channels dedicated to food which has also helped in pointing one's attention to food. Food has also made its entry into literature. Even though mention of food could be found in many early literary books, it has recently occurred to critics that food can be seen in its deeper symbolic meaning.

Food has a complex relationship with our culture and society and this can be critically studied across numerous disciplines in the humanities, social sciences, and sciences. Gina M. Almerico in her article entitled, "Food and identity: Food studies, cultural, and personal identity", says food studies is not only the study of food itself; it is different from more traditional food-related areas of study such as agricultural science, nutrition, culinary arts, and gastronomy because it deals with more than the simple production, consumption, and aesthetic appreciation of food. It is the study of food and its relationship to the human experience. This relationship is examined from a variety of perspectives which lends a multidisciplinary aspect to this field by encompassing areas such as, art, sociology, education, economics, health, social justice, literature, anthropology, and history. (2-3)

Food connects humans and perhaps all living beings by a common urge they all need to share. In our daily lives across worlds, apart from satisfying our hunger, food also brings people together, helps them communicate, relate, connect, bond and establish intimate nurturing and sustaining relationships. It is hard to imagine any occasion without food by its side. And as eating is almost always a social or group activity, as opposed to sex, food becomes a focus of symbolic activity about sociality and our place in our society. Thus food apart from playing a biological function also plays cultural and symbolic function in order to create and shape one's identity which consists of both cultural and ethnic identity.

What one eats or prefers not to eat communicates aspects of a person's identity or emotion in a manner that words alone cannot express. Therefore we need to study the deeper meanings of food because food studies can challenge us to look deeply into the common daily occurrence of eating and find deeper meaning in this ordinary practice. It can help us understand ourselves and others better. It can help debunk stereotypes and promote acceptance across individuals and groups.

While speaking about food the terms 'abundance' and 'scarcity' naturally arises in one's mind. As Indians these terms are even more common to us. Considered normally, the terms 'abundance' and 'scarcity', are seemingly antonymous to each other. However the case is entirely different from this. It is generally in the midst of abundance that we talk about scarcity. For example in India, where some people specially from the richer section of the society, due to the craze of 'zero-sized' figures let their stomachs remain half empty in the name of 'dieting', we can also witness the fact in spite of having abundant food resources, many poor Indian people cannot acquire two square meals a day and therefore have to go to bed empty stomach. It is also an equally true and disheartening fact that in our country beggars and slum dwellers are so

common to us that most of the time we don't bother to even notice them, let alone think about or feel sorry for them or help them. They are simply shooed away as a menace.

There are daily reports of many millions of Indians starving or suffering from chronic malnutrition because they are too poor to buy food at market prices. On the other hand it has also been reported recently that, obesity levels in India have more than doubled in children and tripled in adults over the past three decades. Thus India has to fight two types of battle- one of under-nutrition and the other of over-nutrition. Apart from this it is also an equally reported fact that every year many millions of tons of food grain are left to rot out in the open, due to lack of adequate storage. This happens every year. And every year the government procures more and more food grain, more and more of which goes to scandalous waste. And this is exactly how we face scarcity as well as price hike in the midst of abundance.

Along with this, mass media also plays a dominant role in our eating habits as well as gender discrimination. We hardly see any fat actresses on television screen, and even if we notice some, they are constantly talked about by media and fashion critics and are also sometimes portrayed in negative light. On the other hand, actors having huge, muscular body are generally loved by all whereas thin and frail looking men are assumed to have less importance or attractiveness. These kinds of comparisons are still prevalent in today's world even when we talk about gender equality. Thus our bodily shape and size which is mostly result of our eating habits plays an important role in shaping our internal as well as external personality as well as our mentality and identity.

Moreover in certain places, and especially in India, we find gender discrimination regarding food, which means even if food is available, females are given less to eat than males. Along with this, Indians are also known for traditional fasting and self denial of food and food choices. Mostly Hindu women observe different types of fasting such as 'solah somvar vrat' or fasting during Karva Chauth' and other such occasions. Also in some parts of our country the inhuman practice of widows starving themselves is still present.

Thus all this incidents points to the fact that the relation between scarcity and abundance of food is not as simple as it seems, and therefore it needs to be critically examined. These stark realities of scarcity and abundance of food is well represented in the writings of many Indian writers. The concern for the poor, the hungry the destitute have become a common theme in Indian Literature in English. Indian writers have joined hands with the whole nation which had been fighting the British rule which was the root cause of the destruction of the Indian economy. Famous Indian writers like Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Bhabani Bhattacharya and Kamala Markandaya gave full vent to their suppressed resentment against the social as well as the economic evils in fictional terms.

Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* (1933) and *Coolie* (1936) both have similarities in their social background which include exploitation by landlords and masters, ill fate created by surroundings, false social beliefs etc. For instance, Bakha finishing his job, which is the cleaning of latrines, returned to his hut as he was thirsty and wanted to drink water. But he found the

pitcher empty and he had to wait for a long time for the pitcher to be filled. As they were untouchables they had no right to draw water from the well. Therefore they had stand in line with other untouchables and “depend on the bounty of some of their superiors to pour water into their pitchers”. While going to sweep the market road and temple courtyard on the way, he bought four annas worth of cheap sweetmeat after much speculation:

'Eight annas my pocket', he said to himself, 'dare I buy some sweets? If my father comes to know that I spend all the money on sweets', he thought and hesitated, 'but come, I have only one life to live', he said to himself, 'Let me taste of the sweets; who knows, tomorrow I may be no more.' (U 36)

The sweet vendor cheats Bakha of his money and throws the jalebis at him simply because he is an untouchable. However Bakha being poor as well outcaste, dared not complain. In another instance Anand lays bare the real inhumanity to which untouchables are subjected. Here we see Bakha receiving both abuses and pancakes thrown at him by a house-wife from the house-top. All these incidents show the harsh conditions faced by the poor people of the country. Even if there is food enough in India to feed its entire population, these poor people cannot get hold of their daily share of food.

Similar is the case in *Coolie* where the main protagonist Munoo is the victim of world's devilry. He is also a poor boy like Bakha. He inherited his poverty and squalor from his exploited father, who died when he was a mere child. Munoo searches for food in a world where poor man's flesh and blood is considered cheaper than food. It makes him restless and forces him to move from place to place and finally fall into the clutches of death. The starvation faced by Munoo is an ironical comment on the agriculture based nation – India. When Seth Prabha Dayal, owner of a pickle factory in Daultapur, picks up Munoo, he feeds him well. Anand ironically describes the food being offered to Munoo as the most lavish meal he had eaten since the feast, given by his aunt, on the death anniversary of his parents.

Both the protagonist Bakha and Munoo want to live their lives but the society does not allow them to do so. Therefore they die of poverty, exploitation and most importantly, hunger, due to the scarcity of food in their lives as they cannot manage to buy a good meal to feed their hungry stomachs. Anand's picture of the Indian poor and their suffering is both realistic as well as pathetic.

R. K. Narayan in his novel *The Guide* (1958) presents the superstitious belief of Indians on fasting. Raju, the main protagonist of the novel was a fraud in his past life due to which he was jailed for some time. After his release people mistook him as an ascetic and thus he was compelled to live the life of a sanyasi. He was obliged to undergo fasting due to the devotion of his followers, who believed if a great man fasted, their problems would be reduced by the coming of rain. Thus Raju had to unwillingly become a victim of India's religious tradition of fasting or starving oneself willingly. Similar to *The Guide*, Arun Joshi in *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1971) gives a sketchy view of drought-caused hunger. In Bhabani Bhattacharya's novels such as *So Many Hungers!* (1947) and *He Who Rides a Tiger* (1954), the theme of man-

made hunger is given an elaborate and comprehensive coverage. Apart from these writers other writers like Kamala Markandaya in *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) and *A Handful of Rice* (1966) and Ruth Praver Jhabvala in *Heat and Dust* (1975) have also given powerful voices to the problem of human degradation, evils of casteism as well as problems of hunger and starvation which arises from the scarcity and unavailability of food in the lives of many Indian people.

On the other hand in Anita Desai's famous novel, *Fasting Feasting*(1999), *Kiran Desai's Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* (1998)and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices* (2005) we can see instances of both scarcity and abundance as well as scarcity in the midst of abundance.

Fasting Feasting is basically a novel showing the contrast between two apparently opposite cultures- Indian, known for its spiritual dimension and sanctimonious and longstanding tradition and customs representing 'fasting' and the other, American, a country of luxury and sumptuousness typifying 'feasting'. The characters in the novel symbolise these two aspects of the Indian and American culture. Uma signifies fasting and Arun signifies feasting. These two aspects are multiple and relative at the same time as perceived by the main protagonist of each part respectively.

In Uma's case it is an unwilling fasting as suffered by many women in their life. From the beginning of the novel one can understand the cause of Uma's irritation and disappointment with her life. It is because MamaPapa continuously shouts at her for things to be done and also because she is almost old with grey hairs and still unmarried. The scarcity in Uma's life can also be understood in terms of Uma's suppressing her own desires for the sake of her family. Uma had to sacrifice even her little, harmless wishes. For instance once when she went for an outing to the park with her parents, she mortified her simple desire of having some peanuts: "Uma finds saliva gathering at the corners of her mouth at the smell of the spiced, roasted gram but decides to say nothing." (F, F 24)

Uma also loved Mira-masi's visits to their home because she made tasty ladoos but this choice of Uma is also attacked by Mama as if she has put forward an avaricious wish. Once or twice in the book, one can also see Uma desperately trying to nurture a spirit of rebellion, thereby fulfilling her desires. For example, her trying to escape to her convent school where she enjoyed her own separate daily existence, or the instance of eating an unripe guava and even sharing it with Arun. She cut the fruit into quarters and eights and sprinkled with salt for a treat. It was a strongly forbidden treat. But this time Uma acted wickedly irresponsible. Arun who was younger to Uma, could feel that he has a more powerful place within the family than his older sister. When Uma while devouring the guava reminded him of his biting her finger, he threatened her by saying he would report their parents that she sneaked forbidden snacks to him. Even though he is still a child and therefore playful, the effects his threats have on Uma are real.

Evidences of gendered stereotypes and gender discrimination regarding food can be seen when it is revealed that even Uma's dominating mother faced the same condition in her earlier days, as she says:

“In my day, girls in the family were not given sweets, nuts, good things to eat. If something special had been bought in the market, like sweets or nuts, it was giving to the boys in the family.” (F,F19)

However, she also says that, “ours was not such an orthodox home that our mothers and aunts did not slip us something on the sly”. This comment of her makes clear the fact that, it indeed was an orthodox society where girls were not allowed to eat or relish special food items. Those food items were specifically for the males of the family. And if girls were to eat those food items, they had to eat it under concealment away from the glare of the males.

For instance, although we see Papa relishing on sweets and big oranges etc. we are never given any hint as to whether Uma or the other female members of the family enjoyed such bountiful treats, especially in front of Papa, the patriarch of the family. Thus, the contemporary tradition during Mama’s childhood is still continuing in Uma’s present life.

In all these cases as well as others, it was ultimately Uma who had to face the anger of her family, who had to suffer pain and shame in front of others as well as apologise for indulging in her desires. The scarcity in her life as represented mostly in the midst of food could never be satiated basically due to her parents’ dominance as well as due to the lack of encouragement from the outer society. Thus, Uma can be seen suffering and going through an unwilling, metaphorical fasting and deprivation. This deprivation or scarcity in her life arose in spite of the good condition of their family, mainly as a result of gender discrimination. She was also kept away from bountiful choices and opportunities that life offered every now and then, and was thrashed back inside the house by her own parents.

While Uma suffered all her life due to scarcity and metaphorical fasting, it was Arun who got an abundance of everything in his life. He was even forced to have rich foods as his parents thought it is very necessary for the development of their son. When Arun shifted to America, the abundance and varieties of food was beyond Arun’s expectations. There Mrs. Patton, Arun’s host showed him how to shop. She read the labels on the cans and cartons of food with high seriousness. She checked the difference between brands not only for their different prices but also for their relative food value and calorific content, as most educated people are inclined to do. However they were there to buy some vegetarian food as opposed to the non-vegetarian food as preferred by most of the Americans. Here another point to be noted is that turning vegetarian has become quite a fashion today. Non-vegetarian food which has been an option for mostly the well-off sections of the society is being slowly rejected by them. This is done in order to keep oneself healthy and may be also as a statement of fashion and publicity.

Mrs Patton’s job as she herself said was to keep the freezer full as everyone in her family eats at different times and wants different meals. Therefore she frequently went to shop for their food and kept the freezer and kitchen shelves well-stocked while Arun tried to make sense of such a hoard of purchases, worried they would never make their way through so much food. Once she filled her kitchen with food, she was content. It did not occur to her that there might be another

stage beyond this final satisfying one. She had no idea of cooking and serving her guests as was the custom in India.

Moreover, the Americans evidently did not know that the raw foods that everyone there thought to be the natural diet of a vegetarian, were not the food that figured in his culture. Therefore it was left to Arun to choose what he wanted from the hoard that his host had foraged and gathered and put forth and thus seeing so much of it, he developed a hearty abhorrence for the raw vegetarian food. It was for the first time in his life that Arun found himself craving for those home cooked food which he had taken for granted while he was at home, and even at times thought was an unbearable nuisance to consume those meals, whether he wanted them or not. And even though he was far removed from home, from the dominance of his parents, he felt that lack of taste or choice in his life even in the midst of bounty and abundance not only of opportunities but also of food. Thus there is a similarity between Arun's and Uma's life. While Uma suffered from lack of freedom, Arun in spite of being free in another country was suffering almost the same fate as Uma thereby representing two opposite sides of a single coin which ultimately resembles each other.

While we see Uma and Arun suffering and starving due to the lack of choices and freedom in their life, in one hand, instances of self-induced suffering can be seen on the other hand in the representation of people like Mira-masi and Melanie, who starved themselves at their own will in spite of having different food choices at their end. Mira Masi made herself suffer because she deeply believed in the so called 'rules' that the prevalent tradition of her time, prescribed for widows like her, thus highlighting her blind faith on the traditions imposed by the society and also her utmost self-control to stay away from the pleasures of life and to stick by her life choices as well as food-choices even though she may be starving. And Melanie in spite of being a modern girl let herself suffer because she wanted to get slim, which has been the prevalent fashion since a long time. Thus, instances keeping oneself hungry even when one has enough food at their disposal can be found across time and ages and cultures.

The theme of scarcity and abundance is also present in Kiran Desai's *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*. The novel itself opens with the description of a long standing drought and unbearable heat, which led to water and food scarcity. In the beginning of the novel one can find a search for an explanation of the mysteriously prolonged drought. However I assume that this period of scarcity was actually caused due to the careless attitude of humans towards Nature, which is quite evident in our reckless use of natural resources such as cutting down trees or careless use of water etc. Things took a good turn only when the rains arrived at last. It was during this heavy rainfall that Sampath, the protagonist of the novel was born. The coming of rain marked an end to the scarcity faced by the people and brought abundance of water as well as unexpected food supply to them (the crate of the Red Cross supplies, full of food, that had been dropped by a Swedish relief plane in Shahkot most probably due to the swirling clouds and heavy rains) Rain which is very necessary for the survival of our environment has always been linked with the sprouting of new lives on earth. This time also rain gave new life to the people of Shahkot. Besides, it also established a fantastical relation between Sampath and the abundance of food.

Chance and the existence of superstitions in our society played a very important role in the transformation of Sampath from a messy and unsuccessful youth to a wise man of unusual spiritual nature. Fed up with his daily life at home, Sampath one day fled away to a guava orchard in the outskirts of the town, in order to find peace. There he climbed up a guava tree and never came down. His unusual behavior attracted public's attention towards him. His luck changed specifically when he started asking people of their personal affairs. He seemed to know all their secrets. But the reality was that he actually learnt about people's affairs when he sneaked upon their letters during his job in the local post-office. However the simple Shahkotians never knew of this reality or thought of this possibility, because their eyes were already blinded under the folds of superstitious and religious beliefs.

Thus they started offering Sampath various gifts in order to know the solution to the problems of their lives and also as a gesture of devotion and thankfulness. Sampath very clearly took advantage of this situation, as most people in power and under the name of religion are inclined to do so. He never provided any clear solution to them and always talked in riddles, which is also a reality of the powerful people in our society. But his devotees somehow managed to carve wonderful meanings out of his riddles and thus it ensured Sampath's continuous growth as their leader and demigod and also helped him to exploit them further. This fictional case of Sampath is equally true in our daily lives where politicians lure temptable people with riddles and false promises, in order to ensure their strong hold over society, which would help them to keep their position of power intact.

It was Sampath's parents who made most of the opportunities out of Sampath's advantageous position. Sampath's father Mr Chawla, who was an ambitious man, saw commercial possibilities in him and within a month of arriving at the orchard, made all sorts of improvements to his family's living arrangements. He tapped the hospital electricity lines for light, and due to the excellent power supply in the hospital, they managed to spare all the breakdowns and fluctuations suffered by the rest of the town. A whole batch of regular orchard visitors helped him in laying water pipes through which they drew water from a private tank. Also as a special courtesy, provisions such as matches, kerosene, candles and soap were delivered to them from a shop in the town. He also opened up shops near the orchard for the devotees to buy offerings and exploited them to the fullest extent.

On the other hand with the rising fame of Sampath his mother, Kulfi got an opportunity to explore possibilities in the outer world. In the beginning of the novel one can see how Kulfi's imagination with food is extraordinarily grand and gluttonizing. Pregnant with Sampath, she imagined not of her unborn baby, but of food:

“Of fish in many forms. Of fish big enough and good enough to feed the hunger that had overtaken her in the past months like a wave. She thought of fish curries and fish kebabs... She thought of food abundant in all its many incarnations.” (HGO 4)

She would even go to the extent of bribing the fruit and vegetable sellers and the butcher with silk and embroidery until they had nothing left to give her. With the growth and development of

Sampath inside her belly, Kulfi's stomach grew larger and her dreams of eating became more extravagant. Kulfi's obsession with food which supposedly started during the period when she was pregnant with Sampath, seems to continue throughout her life.

Sampath's fame gave her an outlet to live her dreams, to explore and make her dreams of extravagant and lavish dishes come true and also to appease her never ending greed for more. As the novel progresses the reader is tempted with descriptions of various types of food items as well as several exotic dishes. Kulfi, took upon herself the responsibility of her son's nourishment. She sourced all of her unusual ingredients for cooking from Nature itself because she was not satisfied with the ingredients that came bottled and packaged on store shelves or withered in bazaar baskets. Her love for cooking and feeding Sampath and herself was so much that she even attempted to steal the experimental plants from the agricultural centre's annual display or even getting into the cage of rare pheasants in the tiny zoo of Shahkot. She even waded out into the muddy ponds to collect lotus stems and also raided bird's nests. She emerged back from the forests with her hands full of flowers and the corners of her sari tied into knots containing ginger lilies, rain-fever mushrooms, samples of seeds and bits of bark and what not.

Her kitchen contained an abundance of different food items that she prepared such as rows of pickle jars maturing in the sun, various roots scattered upon a cot to dry, tiny wild fruits, lemon and pumpkins let on the roof to dry, all manner of things fermented in tightly sealed tins; chilly peppers, buffalo curd dripping from a cloth on its way to transforming into paneer. She sliced and pounded and chopped a chaos of ingredients. As a result, she produced very intricate meals which were cooked sometimes with a hundred ingredients. As the spice-laden aromas billowed forth from her cooking, Sampath was filled with desire for her dishes:

Kulfi served her son with an anxious look, watched his face like a barometer. Turning blissful lips to the sky, or at other times looking down in pain, with tears pouring from his eyes, his ears exploding, barely able to breathe, Sampath would beg: 'More! Please, some more.' And triumphantly Kulfi would rush back to get another helping. (HGO 102)

All day long Kulfi worked in her kitchen trying this and that and producing meals of such flavor and rarity, that others were intoxicated by its smells. Sampath had never eaten so well in all his life. He grew plump day by day and his bodily development proved how well the meals agreed with him. The tensed, worried expression of Sampath which was always present in his face before coming to the orchard slowly melted into one of contentment which proves how the food we eat can influence and transform our mentality. If it suits our tastes we are transported into a state of contentment and pure bliss and on the contrary, when some of us starve day after day, having nothing to eat, our mind would automatically tempt us to do whatever we want or to adopt wrong ways in order to fill our stomachs. For instance, even Sampath's devotees got jealous and curious of the exuberant food eaten by Sampath and Kulfi. Just one whiff was enough to make them wild and greedy.

Thus, from the instances mentioned above, one can sense the transformation that occurred in Sampath's as well as his family's life: from the scarcity of food and water before Sampath's birth

to the abundance of food choices, water and electricity in their lives. Such pleasurable life comes only with fame. Other people who are poor or are not lucky enough, generally cannot dream of such possibilities. Their only dream then would be to feel their stomachs and possibly to maintain their dignity.

Similar to *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, scenes of draught and scarcity is also present in *The Mistress of Spices*. It was during a dry season that Tilo was born. Her village was so dry due to crisis of water that the paddy fields cracked and it was so hot that heat even parched the cracked fields. Water was so scarce that even the mother who was pregnant with Tilo at that time, could not be offered some water. She kept on thrashing the birth mat and groaned for water. Without enough fodder to feed on, the cows also ran dry and the infant Tilo, or Nayan Tara, as she was named by her parents, screamed for food until she was fed milk from a white ass.

Analogous to Uma in *Fasting, Feasting*, Tilo was also ignored by her parents. She spent most of her life alone. However unlike Sampath's feigned omnipotence and wisdom, Tilo was blessed with foresight. Abundance came to her life when she started using her foresight. She seemed to know many things such as who stole the water-carrier's buffalo or where the earth gold lay buried or how to find one's lost ring and so on. She could even warn the village headman of the floods before they came. Thus, she proved useful to her villagers and as a consequence her fame spread far and wide like Sampath. People from far and nearby came to seek her opinions and blessings. They were so impressed by her that they brought her such lavish gifts which were never before seen in her village. Thus she became wealthy. She sat on gold-woven cushions and ate from silver plates studded with precious stones. At meal-times she ate the best portions of everything and threw the leavings on the floor for her brothers and sisters.

Tilo grew arrogant, proud and willful towards everybody, but her parents did not dare ever, to voice their anger, as they were afraid of her power and also loved the luxury-life that her power brought them. This fact can be related to our real life as well. People do get arrogant and selfish when they get what they want and the sufferers dare not voice their complaints out of fear of dominant's sheer power. thus we can say that riches can and do buy power, respect as well as silence from the society.

When Tilo became the Mistress of spices, she was placed in a spice and food shop at Oakland, California which was fully laden with every Indian spices, even the lost ones. However, even though Tilo lived in the midst of variety of food, one can rarely see her feeding or asserting her will. There were certain rules that mistresses had to follow and these rules were closely monitored by the spices. The spices would not work if the mistress tries to bend the rule. Instead, it would rouse the anger of the spices which may be dangerous for the mistress as well as for other peoples surrounding her.

Thus through the theme of scarcity and abundance of food, as well as scarcity in spite of abundance, these writers have tried to portray different facets of life. All the novels mentioned

above shows us how the life and personality of Bakha, Munoo, Raju, Uma, Arun, Sampath and Tilo was shaped, in some way or other, by the lack and presence of food.

Food, a thing which is generally considered to be trivial, can play a noticeable role both in its presence and absence; both in its abundance as well as scarcity. And this scarcity and abundance of food is ultimately caused by human's greed and his careless attitudes towards nature. Depending upon the availability of food and food choices, the personality of an individual forms, develops and changes. Food can make a person as well as break a person, with its availability and unavailability, respectively. While rich people can afford almost as kinds of food, the not so well of kind has to think about what they can eat without burning a hole into their mostly empty pockets. And both the classes live together in a single society reflecting and representing each other and interacting with each other. Thus, it is apt to say that scarcity and abundance are the two sides of a single coin. As the two sides of a single coin oppose each other, the terms 'scarcity' and 'abundance' opposes each other; and as both its sides are hold together at its base by a coin, so is the case of 'scarcity' and 'abundance'- irrespective of their opposition they go together hand in hand. Therefore the role of food in our lives can never be ignored. Whatever we do and whoever we are, it is all depended on the availability or lack of food in our life. As a result, it would not be wrong to assume the presence of food as parallel or similar to presence of freedom in our lives. Our entitlement to food is synchronal to our entitlement to freedom. And instead of careless as well as religious wasting of food we should try to keep alive the religion of 'humanism' by feeding the poor; by keeping away from exploitation and gender discrimination; by freeing ourselves from the false beliefs of religion and also by being a little more careful towards our planet.

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