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How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India

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Cookbooks, which usually belong to the humble literature of complex civilizations, tell unusual cultural tales. They combine the sturdy pragmatic virtues of all manuals with the vicarious pleasures of the literature of the senses. They reflect shifts in the boundaries of edibility, the proprieties of the culinary process, the logic of meals, the exigencies of the household budget, the vagaries of the market, and the structure of domestic ideologies. The existence of cookbooks presupposes not only some degree of literacy, but often an effort on the part of some variety of specialist to standardize the regime of the kitchen, to transmit culinary lore, and to publicize particular traditions guiding the journey of food from marketplace to kitchen to table. Insofar as cookbooks reflect the kind of technical and cultural elaboration we grace with the term *cuisine*, they are likely, as Jack Goody has recently argued, to be representations not only of structures of production and distribution and of social and cosmological schemes, but of class and hierarchy (1982). Their spread is an important sign of what Norbert Elias has called “the civilizing process” (1978). The increased interest of historians and anthropologists in cookbooks should therefore come as no surprise (Chang 1977; Cosman 1976; Khare 1976a, 1976b).

This essay discusses cookbooks produced by a particular type of society at a particular moment in its history. The last two decades have witnessed in India an extremely significant increase in the number of printed cookbooks pertaining to Indian food written in English and directed at an Anglophone readership. This type of cookbook raises a variety of interesting issues that are involved in understanding the process by which a national cuisine is con-

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structured under contemporary conditions. Language and literacy, cities and ethnicity, women and domesticity, all are examples of issues that lie behind these cookbooks. In examining these issues in the Indian case, we can begin to sharpen our comparative instincts about how cuisines are constructed and about what cookbooks imply and create. But before I begin to describe and interpret these books, I need to introduce a comparative problem regarding culinary traditions to which they draw our attention.

Cookbooks appear in literate civilizations where the display of class hierarchies is essential to their maintenance, and where cooking is seen as a communicable variety of expert knowledge.¹ Cookbooks in the preindustrial world are best documented in the agrarian civilizations of Europe, China, and the Middle East. In these cases, the historical impetus for the production of the earliest cookbooks seems to have come from royal or aristocratic milieus, because these were the ones that could afford complex cuisines and had access to the special resources required for the production and consumption of written texts.

The evolution of a high cuisine, to use Goody's term, does not follow exactly the same form or sequence in each of these locales. But with the possible exceptions of China and Italy, there is in every case a powerful tendency to emphasize and reproduce the difference between "high" and "low" cuisines, between court food and peasant food, between the diet of urban centers and that of rural peripheries. Imperial cuisines always drew upon regional, provincial, and folk materials and recipes. Preindustrial elites often displayed their political power, their commercial reach, and their cosmopolitan tastes by drawing in ingredients, techniques, and even cooks from far and wide. Yet these high cuisines, with their emphasis on spectacle, disguise, and display, always seek to distance themselves from their local sources. The regional idiom is here decisively subordinated to a central, culturally superior, idiom. French *haute cuisine* is exemplary of this type of high cuisine. In the cases of China and Italy, by contrast, regional cuisines *are* the *hautes cuisines*, and no imperial or metropolitan culinary idiom really appears to have achieved hegemony, even today. In the Chinese case, to the degree that a civilizational standard has emerged, it appears to be the colorless common denominator of the complex regional variants. In Italy, at least until very recently, it appears to be impossible to speak of a high, transregional cuisine.

¹ The single most important comparative treatment of cuisine from a sociological point of view is found in Goody (1982). In addition to that study, which has provided a good deal of the comparative perspective in this essay, I have also consulted the following sources for my understanding of non-Indian culinary traditions: Ahsan (1979); Austin (1888); Chang (1977); Cosman (1976); Forster and Ranum (1979); Furnivall (1868); Revel (1979); Roden (1972); Rodinson (1950); Root (1977); Vehling (1977). Goody (1982) contains an excellent and extensive bibliography.

In India, we see another sort of pattern, one that is, in some respects, unique. In this pattern the construction of a national cuisine is essentially a postindustrial, postcolonial process. But the traditional Indian picture has some parallels with those of the other major culinary regions of the world. Like the cooking of ancient and early-medieval Europe, preindustrial China, and the precolonial Middle East, cooking in India is deeply embedded in moral and medical beliefs and prescriptions. As in the Chinese and Italian cases, the premodern culinary traditions are largely regional and ethnic. As in Ottoman Istanbul in the seventeenth century, court cuisines drew on foods and recipes from great distances (Sharar 1975). But in contrast to all these preindustrial cases, in India before this century, the emergence of a gustatory approach to food (that is, one that is independent of its moral and medical implications), the related textualization of the culinary realm, and the production of cookbooks seem to have been poorly developed (Khare 1976a).

In the Indian case, the cuisine that is emerging today is a national cuisine in which regional cuisines play an important role, and the national cuisine does not seek to hide its regional or ethnic roots.² Like their counterparts in England and France in the early eighteenth century, the new Indian cookbooks are fueled by the spread of print media and the cultural rise of the new middle classes. As in all the other cases, but notably later, food may finally be said to be emerging as a partly autonomous enterprise, freed of its moral and medical constraints. The Indian pattern may well provide an early model of what might be expected to occur with increasing frequency and intensity in other societies having complex regional cuisines and recently acquired nationhood, and in which a postindustrial and postcolonial middle class is constructing a particular sort of polyglot culture. This pattern, which is discussed in the rest of this essay, might well be found, with the appropriate cultural inflections, in places like Mexico, Nigeria, and Indonesia.

THE SOCIAL WORLD OF THE NEW INDIAN CUISINE

The audience as well as the authors of the English-language cookbooks produced in India in the last two decades are middle-class urban women. But the middle class in India is large and highly differentiated. It includes civil ser-

² Goody's discussion of the Indian material (Goody 1982:114–26) takes issue at several points with the approach and arguments of R. S. Khare (1976a, 1976b). On the question of whether a pan-Indian high cuisine existed in premodern India, Goody appears to have confused the question of regional and courtly *high* cuisines with the matter of a *national* cuisine. For the latter, there is little evidence until the second half of this century. I am also inclined to support Khare's view that the cultural significance of cooking within the Hindu system remains incidental. More exactly, it might be said that Brahmanical normative thought gives short shrift to cooking, but royal practices as well as the divine cuisines of the great temples show highly differentiated, though regional, styles of cooking. On sacred cuisine in premodern South India, see Breckenridge (1986). Even here, collections of recipes are hard to find, though lists of ingredients, dishes, and meals frequently appear.

vants, teachers, doctors, lawyers, clerks, and businessmen, as well as film stars, scientists, and military personnel. Some of these persons belong to the upper middle class and a few to the truly wealthy. This middle class is largely to be found in the cities of India, which include not only the international entrepôts such as Bombay and Calcutta, and the traditional capitals like Delhi and Madras, but also smaller industrial, railroad, commercial, and military towns of varying orders of size, complexity, and heterogeneity.

The women who read the English-language women's magazines, such as *Femina* and *Eve's Weekly*, as well as the cookbooks in English that are closely allied sociologically to these magazines, are not only members of the super-elite of the great Westernized cities, they also belong to the professional and commercial bourgeoisie of smaller towns throughout India. As more and more public organizations (such as the army, the railroads, and the civil service), as well as more and more business corporations, circulate their professional personnel across India, increasing numbers of middle-class families find themselves in cities that harbor others like themselves, who are far from their native regions. This spatially mobile class of professionals, along with their more stable class peers in the cities and towns of India, creates a small but important class of consumers characterized by its multiethnic, multicasite, polyglot, and Westernized tastes. This class is linked in particular towns by a network of clubs, social committees, children's schools, cookery classes, and residential preferences. They are nationally linked by their tastes in magazines, clothing, film, and music, and by their interpersonal networks in many cities. Though this class has some very wealthy persons in it, along with some who can barely afford to belong to it, its core consists of government servants, middle-rung professionals, owners of medium-sized businesses, and middle-rank corporate employees. It is this class, rather than the sophisticated super-elites of Bombay, Delhi, Calcutta, Madras, and a few other cities, that is constructing a new middle-class ideology and consumption style for India, which cuts across older ethnic, regional, and caste boundaries. Cookbooks are an important part of the female world of this growing urban middle class.

The interplay of regional inflection and national standardization reflected in the new cookbooks is the central preoccupation of this essay. It represents the culinary expression of a dynamic that is at the heart of the cultural formation of this new middle class. Cookbooks allow women from one group to explore the tastes of another, just as cookbooks allow women from one group to be represented to another.

In the social interaction that characterizes these urban middle-class families, women verbally exchange recipes with one another across regional boundaries and are eager to experiment with them. The oral exchange of recipes is, from the technical point of view, the elementary process that underlies the production of these cookbooks. In many of the introductions to

these cookbooks, the authors thank women they have known in various metropolitan contexts for sharing recipes and skills. In some cases, it is possible to discern a progression from orally exchanged recipes to full-fledged ethnic or “Indian” cookbooks. The terseness of many of the recipes in the new cookbooks may testify to the fact that they are intended only as references and aids in a largely oral form of urban interaction.

But the exchange of recipes also has other implications, for it is frequently the first stage in a process that leads to carefully controlled interethnic dining. In urban kitchens, there is often a good deal of informal culinary interaction between female householders that by-passes the question of formal dining. In a society where dining across caste or ethnic boundaries is still a relatively delicate matter, recipes sometimes move where people may not. In traditional India, as we shall see, commensal boundaries were central to the edifice of the caste system. But the movement of recipes in the new urban middle-class milieu is one sign of the loosening of these boundaries. In many cases, the movement of recipes across caste, language, and ethnic boundaries is accompanied by an increase in formal (and informal) entertaining and dining across these boundaries.

In turn, the exchange of recipes, oral in origin but aided and intensified by the new cookbooks, clearly reflects and reifies an emerging culinary cosmopolitanism in the cities and towns of India, which is reflected in other consumption media as well. The trend setters as well as followers in this process are women who often-times work in multiethnic job settings (as their husbands do), whose children are acquiring broader tastes in school lunchrooms and street-vendors’ stalls, and whose husbands feel the pressure to entertain colleagues and contacts at home. In all these contexts, what are created, exchanged, and refined are culinary stereotypes of the Other, stereotypes that are then partly standardized in the new cookbooks.

The predicament of these middle-class women is quite complex, however, for the homogenization of a certain middle-class life style calls for diversification of consumption patterns in many domains, including clothing, interior decoration, and cuisine. In the domain of food, the push to diversify the housewife’s culinary skills comes from a variety of sources: the push of guests who want to taste your regional specialties (as they have constructed them in the course of their own interactions, travels, and readings of cookbooks), the push of children who are tired of “the same old thing,” and the push of ambitious husbands to display the metropolitan culinary ranges of their wives. At the same time that she is dealing with these pressures to diversify her skills and add to her inventory of ethnic food specialties, the typical middle-class housewife also has another clientele, composed of her husband (in another, more primordial guise), her more traditional in-laws and other relatives, and important country cousins who crave food in the specialized mode of the region, caste, and community from which they originally come. This clientele

is either simply conservative in its tastes or, worse still, has acquired new-fangled urban notions of authenticity regarding their own natal cuisine. Many middle-class housewives are thus on a perpetual seesaw that alternates between the honing of indigenous culinary skills (and if they have lost them, there are books to which they can turn) and the exploration of new culinary regions. It is the tacit function of the new cookbooks to make this process seem a pleasant adventure rather than a tiring grind.

What is tiring is not only the acquisition, refinement, and display of constantly new culinary wares, but other, less subtle pressures. In the middle-class world I am describing, the budget is a central instrument, for husbanding money as well as time. Many of the new cookbooks emphasize that they are specifically designed to resolve shortages of time and money in urban settings. They therefore frequently offer menus, shortcuts, and hints on how to get more out of less. Some of them explicitly recognize the dual pressure on working women to earn part of the family's livelihood and simultaneously to cater to the culinary sophistication of their families and friends. While authenticity, attractiveness, and nutritional value remain the dominant values of the new cookbooks, efficiency, economy, and utility are becoming increasingly respectable themes.

One very striking example of how this new metropolitan pragmatic begins to erode traditional concepts can be seen in the role of leftover foods in the new cookbooks. Leftovers are an extremely sensitive category in traditional Hindu thought (Khare 1976b; Marriott 1968; Appadurai 1981) and, though in certain circumstances they are seen as positively transvalued, most often the eating of leftovers or wastes carries the risk of moral degradation, biological contamination, and loss of status. Their treatment and the etiquette that surrounds them stand very near the moral center of Hindu social thought. Yet the new cookbooks, which are in other respects hardly iconoclastic, frequently suggest ways to use leftovers and wastes intelligently and creatively. While the traditional prohibitions concerned food contaminated by human saliva rather than by the cooking or serving process, all waste products customarily bear some of the aura of risk associated with leftovers in the narrow sense. Several books contain chapters on the treatment of leftovers. There is even one cookbook, *Tasty Dishes from Waste Items* (Reejhsinghani 1973a), that is built entirely around this principle. Its author goes so far as to say in her introduction that she is "taking these discarded articles of food out of the wastebin and [making] interesting and delightfully different dishes from them." As caste differences come increasingly to be perceived as differences between ethnic entities (Dumont 1970), so food differences come to be seen as consumption issues divorced from the realm of taboo and prohibition. Of course, as food emerges from its traditional moral and social matrix, it becomes embedded in a different system of etiquette—that of the drawing room, the corporate gathering, the club event, and the restaurant.

The history of food consumption outside the domestic framework has yet to be written for India, but there is little doubt that traditional nondomestic commensality was confined to religious and royal milieus, where traditional social or religious boundaries could be maintained even in public eating places. To some extent, public eating places in modern India still seek to maintain boundaries among castes, regions, and food preferences. But restaurants, both humble and pretentious, have increasingly become arenas for the transcendence of ethnic difference and for the exploration of the culinary Other. Restaurant eating has become a growing part of public life in Indian cities, as wealthy families begin to socialize in restaurants and as working men and women find it easier to go out for their main meals than to bring food to work with them. These restaurants tend to parallel, in their offerings, the dialectic of regional and national logics to be noted in the new cookbooks. These twin developments sustain each other.

In addition to the homes and restaurants of the new middle classes, where the new cuisine (in both its provincial and its national forms) is being practiced, transmitted, and learned, a variety of public arenas offer versions of it: food stands in train stations, dining cars of the trains themselves, army barracks, and clubs, student hostels, and shelters of all kinds. Although each of these public arenas contributes to the new interethnic and transregional cuisine in a different way and to a different degree, they all represent the heightened importance of institutional, large-scale, public food consumption in India. The efflorescence of increasingly supralocal and transethnic culinary arenas explains why the pace of change in traditional commensal boundaries (so critical to the caste system) is so much greater than in the realm of marriage, a matter on which there has recently been a lively exchange (Khare 1976b; Goody 1982). Food boundaries seem to be dissolving much more rapidly than marriage boundaries because eating permits a variety of registers, tied to particular contexts, so that what is done in a restaurant may be different from what is seen as appropriate at home, and each of these might be different in the context of travel, where anonymity can sometimes be assured. This kind of compartmentalization, to use Milton Singer's felicitous phrase, is not a realistic option in the domain of marriage, though it might well be in the domain of sexual relations. The new cuisine permits the growing middle classes of Indian towns and cities to maintain a rich and context-sensitive repertoire of culinary postures, whereas in the matter of marriage, there is the stark and usually irreversible choice between staying within the ambit of caste rules or decisively, permanently, and publicly breaking them.

The symbiotic differentiation of both class and cuisine that is flourishing in Indian cities is supported by changes in the technology and economy of cooking. The food blender, spice grinder, and refrigerator are seen in more and more homes. There is a large and growing food industry, selling both ingredients and instant foods of many varieties. The commercialization of

agriculture and the increasing sophistication of transport, marketing, and credit make it possible to obtain a wide variety of fruits, vegetables, grains, and spices in most major Indian cities. Major food companies advertise prominently in the women's magazines, sponsor specialized cookbooks, and advertise the glamour of culinary ethnicity. As in the contemporary West, the modern machinery and techniques alleged to be labor-saving devices are in fact agents in the service of an ideology of variety, experimentation, and elaboration in cuisine that puts middle-class housewives under greater pressure than in the past. Thus the *seductiveness of variety* (discussed later in this essay), as an important part of the ideological appeal of the new cookbooks, masks the pressures of social mobility, conspicuous consumption, and budgetary stress for many middle-class wives. Regarded from this point of view, the publishing industry, catering industry, food industries, and the commercial sector in agriculture all have something to gain from the new culinary developments in Indian cities. But the majority of housewives see it as an exciting process of culinary give and take in which they are both contributors and beneficiaries. Before looking closely at the rhetoric of the recent spate of cookbooks, it is necessary to examine briefly the historical and cultural backdrop against which they have materialized.

CULINARY TEXTS AND STANDARDS IN INDIAN HISTORY

In this section, we consider two distinct but interrelated questions. One is the question of why Indian history has not, until recently, witnessed the same degree of textualization of the culinary realm as several other complex civilizations. The other is the question of the historical forces that until this century have militated against the formation of a civilizational culinary standard in India. These questions involve brief excursions into aspects of the Hindu, Islamic, and colonial contexts of Indian history.

The historical example of India runs counter to our instincts, for here is a case of a highly differentiated, literate, text-oriented, and specialist civilization that has not produced a high cuisine on the French, Chinese, or Middle Eastern model. The puzzle is deepened when we consider that food is a central trope in classical and contemporary Hindu thought, one around which a very large number of basic moral axioms are constructed and a very large part of social life revolves (Appadurai 1981; Khare 1976a, 1976b; Marriott 1968). Food in India is closely tied to the moral and social status of individuals and groups. Food taboos and prescriptions divide men from women, gods from humans, upper from lower castes, one sect from another. Eating together, whether as a family, a caste, or a village, is a carefully conducted exercise in the reproduction of intimacy. Exclusion of persons from eating events is a symbolically intense social signal of rank, of distance, or of enmity. Food is believed to cement the relationship between men and gods, as well as between men themselves. Food is never medically or morally neutral.

Whatever the perception of the purely gustatory aspect of particular foods, the issue of their implications for the health, the purity, and the moral and mental balance of the consumer are never far out of sight. Feasting is the great mark of social solidarity, as fasting is the mark of asceticism or piety. Each of these patterns is to be seen in other societies, but the case could be made that the convergence of the moral, social, medical, and soteriological implications of food consumption is nowhere greater than in traditional Hindu India. We are therefore left with the question: Why did Hindu India, so concerned with food as a medium of communication on the one hand and with matters of hierarchy and rank on the other, not generate a significant textual corpus on cuisine?

If we take the long view of food in Hindu thought, which has left ample textual deposits, it is possible to assert that while *gastronomic* issues play a critical role in the Hindu texts, *culinary* issues do not. That is, while there is an immense amount written about *eating* and about feeding, precious little is said about *cooking* in Hindu legal, medical, or philosophical texts. Even a cursory examination of the secondary literature that bears on the subject (Zimmerman 1982; Kane 1974; Khare 1976b) is sufficient to show that food is principally either a moral or a medical matter in traditional Hindu thought. It should also be pointed out that these two dimensions, as in early European and Chinese thought, are deeply intertwined. But the vast body of rules, maxims, prescriptions, taboos, and injunctions concerning food virtually nowhere contains what we would call recipes. Ingredients and raw materials are sometimes mentioned (often in connection with perceptions of balance, seasonality, and the humors), and cooked foods also appear frequently, in connection with special ritual observances. But the processes that transform ingredients into dishes are invariably offstage. Recipes, the elementary forms of the culinary life, are missing in the great tradition of Hinduism.

Yet it is clear that cooking is a highly developed art in Hindu India. How are we to account for the absence of recipes and cookbooks from the otherwise omnivorous tendency of the Hindu elite to codify every sector of life?

The answer must be sought on two levels. The first has already been hinted at: Hindu thought is deeply instrumental, though in a specific cultural mode. Its burning concern is always, however indirectly, to break the epistemological and ontological bonds of this world. Food becomes relevant to this concern as a matter of managing the moral risks of human interactions, or as a matter of sustaining the appetites of the gods (who in turn bestow grace and protection), or as a matter of cultivating those bodily or mental states that are conducive to superior gnosis. In each case, food prescriptions and food taboos are two sides of the same coin. Food thus stays encompassed within the moral and medical modes of Hindu thought, and never becomes the basis of an autonomous epicurean or gustatory logic.

Let us now consider the question of why a pan-Indian Hindu cuisine did not emerge in India. Two possible explanations must be rejected despite their

intuitive appeal. The first is the idea that the host of prohibitions and taboos surrounding food in Hindu India so impoverished the dietary base, especially of the upper castes, that the elementary conditions for the emergence of a complex gastronomic culture could not be met. Though it is true that food is surrounded by a large range of prescriptions and proscriptions in Hindu India, this clearly did not prevent the development of fairly elaborate regional and courtly high cuisines. Further, the existence of a very large set of medical and moral do's and don'ts in the Chinese case had no such repressive effect (Goody 1982:111–12). This leads to a second plausible hypothesis that must also be rejected, and that is the explanation which says that Hindu India was not a unified political entity before colonial rule, and thus the institutional framework for standardization, communication, and the hegemony of some culinary center was absent until the formation of the modern nation-state. The problem with this suggestion is that it does not account for the quite high degree of pan-Indian standardization in other social and cultural forms and expressions, not least the so-called caste system, its ritual accompaniments, and the Hindu religious axioms on which it is founded.

Though the problem deserves more extended research and analysis, I suggest that there are two specific cultural factors that have made it difficult for a premodern Hindu high cuisine to emerge. The first is that there was a deep assumption in Hindu thought that local variation in custom (*ācāra*) must be respected by those in power, and that royal duty consists in protecting such variation unless it violates social and cosmic law (*dharma*). When, in addition, we bear in mind that the producers, distributors, and guardians of the major textual traditions, the Brahmans, did not particularly care (from a religious point of view) about the culinary or gastronomic side of food, we can begin to see why a poorly developed culinary textual tradition in premodern Hindu India and the nonemergence of a *Hindu* culinary standard for all of India might be related phenomena. What little we do know of the Hindu science of cooking—*pāka śāstra*—(see Prakash 1961) suggests that the cookbook tradition, both in Sanskrit and in the vernacular, was informal, fragmentary, and minor. Whether this is the result of a small number of texts or of indifferent preservation and transmission, the impression of a minor genre is unmistakable.

Like other humble traditions that do not enter the ambit of high Hindu thought, Hindu culinary traditions stayed oral in their mode of transmission, domestic in their locus, and regional in their scope. This does not, of course, mean that they were static, insulated from one another, or immune to changes in method or in raw materials. What it does mean is that there was no powerful impetus toward the evolution of a pan-Indian Hindu cuisine. The regional cuisines each had their festive foods, their royal elaborations, and their luxury dishes interacting with plainer, peasant diets keyed to ecological and seasonal factors (Breckenridge 1986). Though it is hard to tell much in

retrospect about how this interaction worked, it is plain that, as regards cuisine, traditional Hindu India was thoroughly Balkanized.

With the arrival of the Mughals in India in the first half of the sixteenth century, the textualization of culinary practice took a significant step forward. The famous Mughal administrative manual, the *Ain-I-Akbari*, contains a recipe section, though the text as a whole is devoted to various aspects of statecraft. It is very likely that the culinary traditions of the princely houses of early modern North India were influenced by the practices of the Mughal court. It is also probable that the current pan-Indian availability (particularly in restaurants) of what is called Mughlai cuisine is closely tied to the political spread of Mughal hegemony through most of the subcontinent.

Mughlai cuisine is a royal cuisine that emerged from the interaction of the Turko-Afghan culinary traditions of the Mughal rulers with the peasant foods of the North Indian plains. Because of its diffusion through the royal courts of North India, and because it is the cuisine of reference for the great restaurateurs of northern and western India, Mughlai cuisine has become synonymous, particularly for foreigners, with Indian food. Though it represents an important step toward an Indian cuisine, its Indic base is restricted to the north and west of the subcontinent. It derives nothing of significance from the cuisines of Maharashtra, Bengal, Gujarat, or of any of the southern states. Though some version of Mughlai food is available throughout contemporary India, it cannot be considered an Indian cuisine if by that designation we mean a cuisine that draws on a wide set of regional traditions. It is the limiting case of a tradition that is “high” without being a civilizational standard.

The textualization of culinary traditions was intensified by the arrival of the printing press. The proliferation of presses, journals, and books in the nineteenth-century colonial context did, among other things, usher in the prototypes of the modern cookbook. Thus, in Maharashtra in the nineteenth century, there are books on household management published in Marathi that contain recipes. There is every reason to suppose that this was happening in the other major linguistic regions of India. In the first half of this century, magazines and newspapers began to address the urban housewife by carrying recipe columns. There is also evidence that the modern vernacular periodical press nurtured the popular taste for cookbooks and cooking skills, both prerequisites for the recent rise of the English-language cookbook. One example of these genetic links is a book by Kala Primlani called *Indian Cooking*, first published in 1968. Primlani’s book began its career as a series of recipe columns in the Sindhi-language daily *Hindvasi*; it was then published in book form in Sindhi before it achieved its English incarnation. An even more famous example of the shift from an Indian- to an English-language book is *Samaiththu Pār* (Meenakshi Ammal, 1968), whose title was literally translated into the English *Cook and See*, since many of the young Tamil women to whom the original was addressed were functional illiterates in their mother

tongue and could not read Tamil. These examples suggest that the vernacular cookbooks and the English-language cookbooks are not wholly discrete genres.³

Though the colonial version of Indian cuisine is the most significant precursor of the emergent national cuisine of the last two decades, it was not confined to the homes of the colonial elite and it did not end with colonialism. Some of its content, and a good deal of its ethos, provided the basis of the culinary manuals and procedures of the Indian army, which even today represents a rather specialized subcontinental culinary standard. And with broader reach, there are certain clubs, restaurants, and hotels that carry on the colonial culinary tradition. The other enclave in which some of the Anglo-Indian ethos of this colonial cuisine is preserved is the Parsi community (Mehta 1979).

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In the national cuisine that has emerged in the last two decades, Mughlai cuisine (to a considerable extent) and colonial cuisine (to a lesser extent) have been incorporated into a broader conception of Indian food. The shape of this new national repertoire can be seen in the recent proliferation of cookbooks, whose structure and rhetoric are the topic of the next two sections.

PROLIFERATION OF GENRES AND THE CULINARY OTHER

The most striking characteristic of English-language books on Indian cooking is the rapid specialization that has occurred within this young field. There are already cookbooks directed toward special audiences, such as *The Working Woman's Cookbook* (Patil 1979) and *Cooking for the Single Person* (Reejhsinghani 1977). There are also entire cookbooks devoted to specific food categories, such as chutneys and pickles (Jagtiani 1973), snacks (Currim and Rahimtoola 1978), vegetable dishes (Lal 1970), and leftovers (Reejhsinghani

³ The question of vernacular cookbooks deserves separate treatment. In general, the new cookbooks raise a series of interesting linguistic and epistemological issues that have been omitted from this essay because of limitations of space. It should be noted that the shift to English is only the most obvious of a series of changes in the sociology of language reflected in the new cookbooks.

⁴ This manual itself appears to be modelled on the important Victorian treatise on household management published by Isabella Beeton (1861). I am grateful to Justin Silber of the University of Houston for drawing this work to my attention. The spread of European ideologies of household management to the colonies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is an important topic for comparative research.

1973a). There are books about Indian cooking produced in the West and oriented partly to Euro-American cooks in search of adventure and partly to expatriate Indians in search of their culinary pasts (D. Singh 1970; Aziz 1983; B. Singh 1961; Hosain and Pasricha 1962; Kaufman and Lakshmanan 1964; Jaffrey 1981; Time-Life 1969). There are cookbooks to guide vegetarians (Srivaran 1980), cookbooks produced by large companies that revolve entirely around a single industrially produced food product (Narayan 1975), and cookbooks that reflect the penetration of the large-scale frameworks of catering schools and restaurant kitchens into the domestic milieu (Philip 1965; Bisen 1970). There are books on Indian cooking that were first published in the United States or England and subsequently republished in India (Attwood 1972; Day 1963). Finally, authentic tokens of a flourishing publishing industry, there are cookbooks based entirely on sales gimmicks, like *Film Stars' Favourite Recipes* (Begum 1981). This inventory is representative but by no means exhaustive.

The proliferation of subspecies suggests that a possible index for the emergence of an authentic high cuisine is precisely the emergence of such crosscutting functional classifications. My assumption here is that a complex culinary repertoire underlies and facilitates the type of deconstruction and recombination to which these specialized books testify. Such specialization is very different from the regional and oral Balkanization that characterized premodern Indian cuisine. This argument leads me to suggest that the surest sign of the emergence of an authentically Indian cuisine is the appearance of cookbooks that deal with special audiences and special types of food. To dissolve this seeming paradox, I turn now to the emphasis of the new books on specialized regional or ethnic cuisines.

An historian of China has suggested that among the prerequisites to the emergence of a full-fledged cuisine is a widely based variety of recipes, so that "cuisine does not develop out of the cooking traditions of a single region" (Freeman 1977:144). The Indian material suggests a further refinement of this observation. In the Indian case, perhaps the central categorical thrust is the effort to define, codify, and publicize regional cuisines. There are books now on virtually every major regional cuisine, as well as on several ethnic minority cuisines, such as the Parsi and Moplah. It is difficult to imagine a book such as Rachel Mutachen's *Regional Indian Recipes* (1969) being published much earlier than it was.

These regional and ethnic cookbooks do two things: Like tourist art (Graburn 1976), they begin to provide people from one region or place a *systematic* glimpse of the culinary traditions of another; and they also represent a growing body of food-based characterizations of the ethnic Other.⁵ These two functions are distinct but intimately connected. A few examples will serve to

⁵ For a sociobiological treatment of ethnic cuisine in contemporary Western contexts, see van den Berghe (1984).

capture the texture of this communicative mode. In a book called *Delicious Bengali Dishes*, Aroona Reejhsinghani says of Bengalis: “Besides sweets they are also very fond of rice and fish, especially fresh-water fish: a true Bengali will eat fish at least once daily and no celebration is said to be complete unless there are a few dishes of fish served in it” (Reejhsinghani 1975:1). Or consider the following characterization of Gujaratis and Gujarati cuisine by Veena Shroff and Vanmala Desai in *100 Easy-To-Make Gujarati Dishes* (1979:i-ii):

Few states in India have such a variety of savory dishes as Gujarat, or a tradition of making and storing snacks. And in a Gujarati home, sweets and snacks are always waiting to be offered to a welcome guest. The use of condiments (*vaghar*) is a practice peculiar to the region. There is a widespread use in Gujarat of mustard seed, fenugreek, thymol, asafoetida and other additives that both make the food tastier and help digestion.

Examples of such ethnic cameos could be multiplied. They play an important part in the introductory sections of the regional and ethnic cookbooks. It is worth noticing that their authors are either transplanted and uprooted professionals (like Premila Lal, a Sindhi born in Tanzania who returned to India) characterizing cuisines that they have themselves learned in a cosmopolitan context, or they are self-advertisements by articulate urban members of a particular ethnic group who seek to publicize its culinary wares, as in the case of Shroff and Desai, both Gujaratis living in Delhi. It should also be noted that these small ethnological cameos hark back to the potted portraits that are the stuff of government gazetteers and ethnographic encyclopedias from the colonial period, where tribes, castes, and linguistic groups were often metonymously captured through the use of the telling custom or the distinctive piece of material technology.

What we see in these many ethnic and regional cookbooks is the growth of an anthology of naturally generated images of the ethnic Other, a kind of “ethnoethnicity,” rooted in the details of regional recipes, but creating a set of generalized gastroethnic images of Bengalis, Tamils, and so forth. Such representations, produced by both insiders and outsiders, constitute reflections as well as continuing refinements of the culinary conception of the Other in contemporary India.

But not only do these constructions build on long-standing and distinct regional cuisines. They also invent and codify new, overarching categories which make sense only from a cosmopolitan perspective. Perhaps the best example of such a process is the growing number of books on “South Indian” cuisine (e.g., Reejhsinghani 1973b; Skelton and Rao 1975) which, taking a distinctly northern perspective, collapse the distinctions between Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Malayali cuisines and lump them together as South Indian cuisine. These books divide their recipes into functional classes organized around basic ingredients or courses (thus crosscutting the internal re-

gional categories), though the names of the various dishes do reveal their specific local origins to those who recognize the names. Of course, all cuisines, however local, reflect the aggregation upward of more humble and idiosyncratic cuisines from as far down as individual household culinary styles. Such telescoping and recategorization is also doubtlessly a slow and constant feature of history in complex societies. But certain regional forms and levels are relatively stable and well formed in the Indian case, and it is these that are now being vigorously articulated in print, juxtaposed, and reaggregated.

One consequence of the bustling marketplace of regional and ethnic culinary images is the sense of advocacy that animates many of the authors, who seem aware that there is a good deal of crowding in the gallery of regional or ethnic cuisines and some danger of exclusion from it. Thus Ummi Abdullah, who has produced a specialized book on *Malabar Muslim Cookery*, states: "I would consider my efforts recompensed if at least some of the traditional Moplah recipes find a permanent place on the Indian menu" (1981:4). A slightly different strategy is exemplified by Shanta Ranga Rao, who boldly calls her book *Good Food From India* (1968), though it is exclusively a collection of recipes from a rather small subcommunity from a microregion in South India.

Books like the one by Shanta Ranga Rao remind us that Indian regional or ethnic cookbooks in English are the self-conscious flip side of books that are engaged in constructing a national cuisine. In this, they differ markedly from vernacular cookbooks, which take their regional context and audience largely for granted.

The new cookbooks are not simple or mechanical replicas of existing oral repertoires. The transition to print in this particular social and cultural context results in a good deal of editing. Most of the ethnic or regional books are selective in specific ways. When written by insiders, they represent fairly complex compromises between the urge to be authentic and thus to include difficult (and perhaps, to the outsider, disgusting) items and the urge to disseminate and popularize the most easily understood and appreciated items, and to promote those already popular, from one's special repertoire. Outsiders who write these books, on the other hand, end up including the easy-to-grasp and more portable examples from alien ethnic or regional cuisines, partly because their own tastes for the exotic are first nurtured in restaurants or other public eating contexts, where the subtleties of that cuisine (which are often domestic) have already been pared down. In both cases, one of the results of the exchange of culinary images is the elimination of the most exotic, peculiar, distinctive, or domestic nuances in a particular specialized cuisine. In national or "Indian" cookbooks, of course, the selective process is much more obtrusive, and whole regional idioms are represented by a few "characteristic" dishes, which frequently are not, from the insider's perspective, the best candidates for this role.

In the jostling of the various local and regional traditions for appreciation and mutual recognition, certain linguistic and regional traditions with greater access to urban resources, institutions, and media are pushing humbler neighbors out of the cosmopolitan view: Thus Telugu cuisine is being progressively pushed out of sight by Tamil cuisine, Oriya by Bengali cuisine, Kannada by Marathi, Rajasthani by Gujarati, and Kashmiri by Punjabi. This does not mean that the humbler traditions have no cookbooks (theirs are frequently in the relevant vernacular), but they are losing in the struggle for a place in the cultural repertoire of the new national (and international) middle classes.

The construction of, and traffic in, culinary representations of the ethnic, regional, or linguistic Other has one dimension that is not reflected in the new cookbooks. These books, whether national or regional, uniformly contain positive ethnic stereotypes; but the orally communicated images of the culinary Other are often less than complimentary, as in other parts of the world throughout history. Thus, South Indians are said to eat (and enjoy) excessively runny food that trickles down their arms to the elbows, Gujaratis are said to eat "sickeningly sweet" food, Punjabi food is said to be heavy and greasy, Telugu food to be inedibly hot, Bengali food to be smothered in pungent mustard oil, and so forth. The new cookbooks, therefore, represent the friendly end of a traffic in interethnic images that has its seamy side.

I turn now to the question of how, at the same time as cookbooks in India are generating an anthology of specialized culinary representations, they are also increasingly responsible for constructing the idea of a national or "Indian" cuisine.

THE INGREDIENTS OF A NATIONAL CUISINE

In the contemporary Indian situation, and to some degree generically, cookbooks appear to belong to the literature of exile, of nostalgia and loss. These books are often written by authors who now live outside India, or at least away from the subregion about which they are writing. Sometimes they are intended for Indians abroad, who miss, in a vague and generalized way, what they think of as Indian food. Sometimes they are written to recollect and reconstruct the colonial idea of Indian food, and in such cases their master trope is likely to be curry, a category of colonial origin. The nostalgia for the glow of empire, in which recipes are largely a Proustian device, is the underlying rationale of at least one book, *The Raj Cookbook* (1981), which has a few "colonial" recipes, squeezed between sundry photographs, advertisements, and newspaper clippings from the twilight of the raj.

How do modern-day cookbooks go about constructing conceptions of a national cuisine in the context of an increasingly articulated gallery of specialized ethnic and regional cuisines? Although each book has a characteristically different strategy, there are a few standard devices. The first is simply to inflate and reify an historically special tradition and make it serve,

metonymously, for the whole. I have already mentioned that Shanta Ranga Rao flatly asserts that hers is a book of Indian recipes when in fact it is much more local in its scope. There is also the widespread assumption, referred to earlier, in cookbooks and restaurants both in India and abroad, that conflates Mughlai food with Indian food.

Another strategy for constructing a national cuisine is inductive rather than nominal: The author assembles a set of recipes in a more or less subjective manner and then, in the introduction to the book, gropes for some theme that might unify them. For many books this theme is found, not surprisingly, in the spices and spice combinations, which are often discussed in loving detail. But even here, since regional variation is so great, the search for universals is often forgotten. Other authors discuss processes, such as roasting, frying, basting, etcetera, in the Indian context in an effort to tie together the diversity of regional cuisines. Yet others take an encyclopedic approach and list a set of implements and ingredients (on the model of the French cookbook's *batterie de cuisine*). Finally, and also in the inductive and encyclopedic mode, there are many books that focus on a particular kind of food, such as pickles, and simply provide a set of recipes from many regions. More cautious authors assume nothing general at all, but content themselves with some diluted ideas and comments about Hindu festivals and customs, where again they create a relatively weak sense of the Indian by juxtaposing specialized observances. In one way or another, many of the prefaces to these collections are inductive, intuitive, and encyclopedic in their approach to what constitutes an Indian cuisine.

But beneath the superficial inductivism lies a deeper set of assumptions concerning the structure of an Indian meal that seems shared by many of these authors. These assumptions can be represented as a structural model of an Indian meal and are reflected in the organization of chapters in many of the books. The structure may ideal-typically be represented in terms of the following sets of items, usually each given a separate chapter: rice-based preparations; breads (usually made of wheat flour, but also including rice and lentil-based pancakes); lentil preparations; vegetable preparations, sometimes subdivided; sweets and savories, which laps over into the contemporary Western domain of the "snack"; pickles and chutneys; and sometimes beverages. Salient sets of regional recipes are then brought together under the appropriate headings. This organization seems to reflect a fairly natural (that is, cultural) ordering of the range of preparations that emphasizes their distinctive properties in terms of the base ingredient (grain, lentil, vegetable, etcetera), or of the process used to prepare them (thus pickles, though based on vegetables and fruits, are processed differently from regular vegetable dishes), or of the mode of consumption (thus snacks and savories are largely set apart by the context—either time of day or of year—in which they are consumed). Though this structure creates strange regional and ethnic bedfellows (the Tamil *dosai*

is placed along with the Punjabi *chapati* under the rubric of “breads” even though the first is a snack food and the second a basic meal item), it facilitates the collection and dissemination of regionally and ethnically variable recipes.

What suggests that what is emerging is more than an arbitrary hodgepodge of regional recipes is the increasingly widespread invoking of the menu idea. Many recent cookbooks have suggested menus, based on a series of slots of the sort I have discussed above, which are then filled with items from different regional or ethnic traditions. The interesting thing about this process is that while, in European and some other cuisines, the idea of a menu is associated with a succession of courses, Indian meals do not normally have a significant sequential dimension. Everything arrives more or less at once in most everyday contexts, although certain key liquid accompaniments to the base grains and certain key condiments may appear at different points. In festive contexts, the temporal dimension is greatly elaborated, and French-style courses are more prominent. Routinely, however, the Indian menu is a synchronic set of discriminations and does not display the diachronic discrimination associated with the idea of courses. Variety is not so closely tied to rhythm and pace as it is in other complex culinary traditions. But the idea of a menu is clearly a way to organize the proliferation of specialized regional and ethnic traditions and to subordinate them to the counterweight of an Indian culinary idiom. The concept of the menu is sufficiently well developed that at least one book, *The Working Woman's Cookbook* (Patil 1979), is a collection of recipes organized entirely as a sequence of suggested menus which combine regional items in extremely interesting ways. What such a book suggests is the availability of an Indian meal structure, as well as an inventory of regional and ethnic options that can be combined and recombined on this scaffolding.

The appearance of structural devices for organizing a national cuisine is accompanied by the development of a sometimes fairly explicit nationalist and integrationist ideology. Thus, for example, a newspaper review of *Indian Recipes* (Lal 1980) says: “Hindi may or may not help in unifying the country; while it is trying hard, there may be no harm in letting an Uttar Pradesh snack win over a Tamil Nadu heart.”

But nationalist exhortations are of limited rhetorical value in the arena of the dining room, the kitchen, and the grocery, and the more subtle and effective ploy of many of the transregional cookbooks involves the seductiveness of variety. Thus, Thangam Philip, a major Indian authority on cooking and nutrition, says in her introduction to another author's cookbook that “if you wish to move out from the traditional and classic recipes of your own community to a wider repertoire, you will find Malini Bisen's *Vegetable Delights* a delightful aid.” Or listen to Aruna Sheth, who says in her introduction to *The New Indian Cookbook* (1968), “Can it be that we are not aware of

variety in India? It was with this thought in mind that I started to look for variety in the form of dishes from different provinces in India.” She goes on to present the following revealing anecdote: “Even the Indians are unfamiliar with many dishes of different provinces. I have made *chakalis*, which are a favorite in Maharashtra and sent a plateful to a friend of mine from the North. Next day when she met me she thanked me for the *masala jalebis* that were so delicious.” This little anecdote contains a good deal of information. It shows, among other things, something of the cross-ethnic urban interaction, at the nodes of which many authors of the new cookbooks stand. The author made a savory snack item that she has rendered a Maharashtrian favorite, a judgment that exemplifies the culinary stereotyping mentioned previously. Her friend (“from the North”), unfamiliar with this item, categorized it as a type of sweet with which she is familiar (a *jalēbi* is a deep-fried sweet that in its pretzel-like quality and in some of its ingredients resembles the *chakali*), but by adding the prefatory *masala* (savory spicing) she created something of a culinary oxymoron. This sort of linguistic misclassification is a constant accompaniment of the social interaction associated with the construction of these new cuisines.

There is one final sign that the idea of national Indian cuisine is now taken for granted—though its structure and logic are by no means standardized—and that is the proliferation of cookbooks that subsume and absorb “Indian” recipes into other, more transcendent, categories. Examples abound. Than-gam Philip’s *Modern Cookery* (1965), produced with an eye to nutritional benefits, restaurant cooking, and extremely Europeanized urban audiences, makes Indian recipes “modern” by looking at them from the perspective of the nutritionist, the food technologist, and the caterer. Madhur Jaffrey’s brilliant *Vegetarian Cooking* (1981), like several others, juxtaposes Indian vegetarian recipes with those from the Middle and Far East, thus appealing mainly, in this case, to a particular audience in the United States. Others stick to Indian vegetarian recipes. The third volume of Harvey Day’s multivolume *Curries of India* runs the reverse operation and includes dishes from Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Malaya, and Thailand under the label *curry*, illustrating a kind of gastronomic imperialism under the colonial trope of curry. There are also books like the recent *Appetizingly Yours* (Currim and Rahimtoola 1978) that are clearly directed to wealthy urban audiences in India, where Indian and Western snacks are promiscuously combined, with the Indian side of the book drawing on a transregional inventory. Thus not only is a national cuisine being constructed from regional or local traditions, but access to this national repertoire permits it to be subordinated to the purposes of other, more general classifications.

The idea of an “Indian” cuisine has emerged because of, rather than despite, the increasing articulation of regional and ethnic cuisines. As in other

modalities of identity and ideology in emergent nations, cosmopolitan and parochial expressions enrich and sharpen each other by dialectical interaction. Especially in culinary matters, the melting pot is a myth.

CONCLUSION

The emergence of a national cuisine in contemporary India suggests a processual model that needs to be tested comparatively in other postcolonial situations in the contemporary world. The critical features of this model are the twin processes of regional and ethnic specialization, on the one hand, and the development of overarching, crosscutting national cuisines, on the other. These processes are likely to be reflected and reproduced in cookbooks designed by and for the urban middle classes, and particularly their female members, as part of the larger process of the construction of complex public cultures involving media, travel, and entertainment.

Of equal comparative interest are the historical and cultural contexts against which the new national cuisines are appearing, contexts that are likely to vary considerably. In the Indian case, a national cuisine has developed recently in spite of a relative historical disinterest in gastronomic issues in classical (Hindu) traditions, so that both the textualization of the culinary realm and the creation of a civilizational culinary standard are recent processes. The final question that deserves further comparative investigation is whether the long-term historical and cultural idiosyncrasies of each case make the culinary dynamics of contemporary societies different, in spite of certain broad processual similarities. To answer these questions, we need to view cookbooks in the contemporary world as revealing artifacts of culture in the making.

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