

**The Role of Food in Domestic and Democratic Spaces:  
A Study through Narratives of Mulk Raj Anand**

**S. Kannan and Dr. B. J. Geetha, Asst. Prof. of English**

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Food and the practice of serving it vary from one culture to the other. Every cultural clan of the existing human population on earth celebrates or sanctifies a particular food. The Mexican craze for chocolate and sanctification of paddy in South India are few notable examples for the glorification food by cultural groups. Beyond the cultural affiliation that people show towards food, there are many political and class oriented roles that are fabricated into every nation when it comes to the production and sharing of food. Though egalitarianism seems feasible with the natural abundance of resources on earth and by modern technologies, still many human lives are lost because of hunger and famine. The research article tries to study the narrative spaces in the fictions of the familiar Indian English writer, Mulk Raj Anand for instances that demonstrate the role played by food in domestic households of rich and poor. The article also tries to deliberate upon the class and caste hierarchy that are embedded in the diegetic space of Anand's fictions by studying the descriptions of royal dining and famished poor as penned down by the writer. By handling *Thirukkural* as the yard stick that lays down ideal domestic and political dogmas for better living, the paper inquires the politics of food and the anthropic hypocrisy represented by Mulk Raj Anand.

The cultural spaces and food practices of the society are intertwined in all the human cultural clans around the world. Only understanding the whole system of collective unconscious and the ways in which that influence the actions of national governance and domestic decision making will the readers of fiction understand the important role played by food and hospitality. C.G. Jung, in *Collected Works* vol. 8, "The Significance of Constitution and Heredity in Psychology" explains the subconscious roll of collective unconscious:

The existence of the collective unconscious means that individual consciousness is anything but a *tabula rasa* and is not immune to predetermining influences. On the contrary, it is in the highest degree influenced by inherited presuppositions, quite apart from the unavoidable influences exerted upon it by the environment. The collective unconscious comprises in itself the psychic life of our ancestors right back to the earliest beginnings. It is the matrix of all conscious psychic occurrences, and hence it exerts an influence that compromises the freedom of

consciousness in the highest degree, since it is continually striving to lead all conscious processes back into the old paths. (Jung 112)

The ancestral beliefs and traditions are always held in high regard in India. When the tractors are introduced in the traditional fields of the country, there were many negative comments. The writer tries to record some of the superstitions. One of the peasants from the rural village exclaims; “‘Han, the corn Goddess, the mother, the giver of all food, has been raped!’ said his devotee, Dhunni Bhagat, running up behind him.” (“The Tractor and the Corn Goddess” 150). While the landlords of the same village tend to achieve more yield by implementing European inventions and getting addicted to drinking luxuries of the West, the poor peasants stick back to the tradition of believing corn as a Goddess.

With the illustrations from the short stories and novels of Anand the research paper tries to distinguish the vital roles played by food in the domestic households of individuals and the power determining role in democracy. Thus Indian sociopolitical and cultural association with food is studied as represented by the socio-conscious learned author.

The vast differences in the food intake of the wealthy and the underprivileged people of India are represented in the novels and short stories of Mulk Raj Anand. While describing the least possible luxury of drinking tea in a poor household of a untouchable cast boy, the writer, expresses the ritual with at most care while comparing that with that of the high teas served by the colonial English communities. That comparative study of the tea habits of the two different communities in the chosen space in different utensils and quality makes the readers understand how the food does not mean nourishment alone, but a whole range of cultural class based ritual nourishing not only physique, but also the consciousness of the individuals in taking the cooked meals. The following passage from *Untouchable* by Anand explains the simple tea drinking as a greatest luxury for the poor:

The sharp, warm taste of the liquid sent forth a queer delight spreading into his flesh. His tongue was slightly burnt with the small sips because he did not, as his father did, blow on the tea to cool it. This was another of the things he had learnt at the British barracks from the Tommies. His uncle had said that the goras didn't enjoy the full flavour of the tea because they did not blow on it. But Bakha considered that both his uncle's and his father's spattering sips were natu habits. He would have told his father that the sahibs didn't do that. But he was too respectful by habit to suggest such a thing, although, of course, for himself he accepted the custom of the English Tommies and followed it implicitly.  
(*Untouchable* 24)

On the contrary to the poor house hold that is explained in the previous passage, the writer in his novel *Private Life of an Indian Prince* describes the extravagant lives of the rich princely inhabitants of our country. The exploitations of the natural resources and man power of the society are explained by demonstrating the democratic imbalance caused because of the biased sharing of the national reserve. Beginning from the basic food requirements to that of the wealthy minerals, the sharing is biased between the privileged, and the under privileged sectors of the society. The writer describes it by narrating the luxurious setup of royal furnishing and food served in their palaces.

... And abroad the foolish shop girls read, with a curiosity made up of escapist romanticism, myths and legends as well as the 'true' stories, written by the hacks of the yellow Press, about the dazzling Rolls- Royces from which this Maharaja shot 150 tigers in his jungle kingdom; and how that maharaja had the most priceless jewels, pearls, with rosy sheens of supernatural qualities and emerald and opals as big as hen's egg, and how the other Maharaja had his drinking water fetched from the holy river Ganges all the way to the Savoy Hotel in London and how he gave 20,000 soldiers. ... (241)

The above passage from the fiction describes the extravagant exploitation of man power and the traditional adherence of the royal clan with no care for the downtrodden or egalitarian mindset to uplift the poor people's needs. But rich people were never ready to even give up the minute habit of only drinking Ganges water. In *Private Life of an Indian Prince*, Anand explains the extravagancy of princes and kings of India who exploited the resources. In a passage in the novel he explains how food and water are fetched with extraordinary care for the royals while the poor peasants of the nation were famished and doomed to poverty.

There was a hush as victor stopped his monologue and went towards the miniature bar we had made in the sitting room.  
'may I mix you a cocktail or will you have some sherry?' Victor broke the lull.  
'Sherry, please.' She was obviously unused to the world of cocktail and even sheries, a glass of beer or an occasional 'gin-and-it' being much more her line of approach through hereditary and environment, and the shop girl's modest emoluments. (332)

The culturally rich and universally acclaimed moralizing book *Thirukkural* has an exclusive section of ten couplets to describe the values of hospitality. The eighty first of the verse collection can be translated as, "All household cares and course of daily life have this in

view guests to receive with courtesy and kindly acts to do.” meaning, the whole design of living in the domestic state and laying up property is to be able to exercise the benevolence of hospitality. Hence Indian culture believed the fact that food preparation and serving it to the deserving guests are one of the prime duties of people who chose to live a domestic matrimonial life.

The ninetieth couplet from *Thirukkural* explains the standard of any host and the hospitality traits of our nation, “The flower of ‘Anicha’ withers away, if you do but its fragrance inhale; if the face of the host cold welcome convey, the guest’s heart within him will fail.” meaning, As the flower of Anicham fades in smelling, so fades the guest when the face is turned away.

When the waiter brought the coffee, and the obsequiousness of his approach irritated me, for it reminded me of the complete joined-hands and bent-forehead servility of the servants in the Sham PurState. on my previous return from Europe I had always felt that the relationship of master and servant in India was most humiliating to both parties, almost like that of the master and slave relationship in Roman times. (*Private Life of an Indian Prince* 380)

The contradictory way of hospitality is explained by the author in his novel. Anand explains how the servants are forced to express fake respect and dominantly act as slaves. Such acts are obviously humiliating to both the parties as rightly explained by the writer. This was the way by which food is prepared and shared among the rich and poor in various social gatherings and have great impact in the social structure of the society.

“A Glossary of Governance” compiled by Shovon Chowdhury in a reputed magazine, comically explains one such instances of social role played by food. The glossary is headed with the line, “There is a lot of governance in India. Every day it is increasing. Here is a brief glossary to help you understand it better.” And one term in the collection is “**Chai pani**: A small gesture of goodwill. Typically pocket-sized.” (*Readers Digest* 118-119). Here, it refers to the small bribing of the officials or government employees with a cup of tea to get some menial tasks done in the government offices or to get a file moved from one table to another in an office.

The domestic roles of food are also dealt in the fictions of the author. The yearning of the pregnant women to take sore food items to satiate Vitamin C deficiency is explained in the short story, “The Tamarind Tree” from *Selected Short Stories* of Mulk Raj Anand.

Ocher-red was the colour of the ripe tamarind fruit, bursting out of the green-brown shells on the branches of the shady tree in Aunt Kesaro’s courtyard. And

Roopa stared at the bud almost as she had contemplated her own juicy lips in the broken mirror before she became pregnant. She did not know why the saliva filled her mouth. But she felt an irresistible longing for the taste of the sharp, sweet fruit.

...She knew that it was the turmoil in her belly that was creating the wild swirling waves of desire. And the flavour of the tamarind alone could appease her yearning. (232)

The passage from the short story explains not only the sour food earnings of the pregnant woman, but also the domestic standards how the daughters-in-law are subordinate to Mothers-in-law in the kitchen provisions of India. There are also instances of the male protagonists describing their love by comparing her to the sweet food items. One instance from the short story, "The Village Idyll" compares the blush of lady love to the ripe sugarcane. "Oh, the fair one, Oh, ripe like the juice of a sugarcane..." (162). The domestic spaces of the Indian households reiterate the importance of food by such pet names derived after the food products too.

The practices and human impulses of a particular social organization or group is defined and kept up as a continuous traditional practice only by the collective unconscious space that exists in the form of textual and non-textual cultural communications. They differ with contextual circumstances, In accordance with governing system and artistic expressions. Not only during the contemporary age of Anand did this social segregation and food politics existed, but even today the food security for all is a question to be raised and solved. Manu Joseph is one of the contemporary Indian English writer, who in his novel *Miss Laila Armed and Dangerous* represents the fake activists of today who tend to enjoy the food security while the subjects for whom they fight are still deprived of the same.

Taken together, her many pranks reveal a pattern, her victims are rich Marxists, socialists, environmentalists, actually anyone in this country who eats salad; also agitators against large dams; foes of genetically modified organisms; summer interns from Columbia School of journalism who wish to liberate Tibet. They are the foes of Damodharbhai. Philosophical Thugs, that is what they are, like the patriarchs of the Sangh on the other side of the fence. And that is the name of her website. PhilosophicalThugs.com .(28)

By commenting on the salad eating elite community of the present globalised era, Manu Joseph wants the readers to contemplate on the modern power hierarchy. The poverty and imbalance in resource sharing is hidden behind masked diplomacies in the present democratic

lootings. As depicted in the fictions of Anand, the hierarchy of rich and poor in dining and the domestic ownership of the kitchen do exist even today in modern ways. The egalitarian society that ensures food security too all the sects of the society can be achieved only by proper governance that is corruption free and committed to the subjects.

As explained deliberately in the three hundred and eighty first couplet of *Thirukkural*, “Who has these six is a lion among kings; an army, subjects, food, ministers, allies and forts.” Only the governance with the six things, an army, people, food, ministers, friends, and a fortress can survive in any situation. Hence food security for all must be ensured in domestic and democratic spaces of the nation for the empowerment of it in the global arena. The narrative spaces of Mulk Raj Anand instruct the independent Indian governance for the same by culling out the vast differences and imbalance in food security of rich and poor in the private and social spaces.

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S. Kannan  
Ph.D. Scholar  
Department of English  
Periyar University  
Salem.  
[kannan627@gmail.com](mailto:kannan627@gmail.com)

Dr. B. J. Geetha  
Asst. Prof. of English  
Periyar University, Salem  
[geetprem05@gmail.com](mailto:geetprem05@gmail.com)