

Portrayal of Food in Select Works of Tamil and English Literatures

S. Pavith, M.A. English Literature

Introduction

Not to forget that when we talk of writing about food it doesn't indicate a transitory reference to tradition it basically means a passage in a book where the author has really written about the food itself creating both visual and verbal impact and to create a mood or to convey the idea, meal a such a human endeavor that it has said the imagination of poets and writers across the ages to provide the ingredients for many wonderful scenes.

Eating has been a basic human activity and activity which is not only necessary for continued existence but also connected with social functions. Eating patterns and rituals, the preference of dining acquaintance and the motive behind these behaviors are basic towards neutering and understanding of human society. Food and drink have not only spiced up but have also given an emblematic inside to the printed pages. Food and function bearing is as old as the Bhagavad Gita, the Bible and the Vedas; it has been a constant source of inspiration since the time it was first put into paper be it a plot device or a method of revealing character, eating, drinking or merry making food has played an important part in many of the novels poems and other literary works. Food and pattern of eating and their symbolism are brought to play because of their elementary place in human life and culture. English and French writings have many a times associated bountiful supply of food with good health and festivity it represents brightness, a more practical approach would be that food representation in artistic words are the level of complexity that make everything related to food and eating a still more important issue in the advancement of a world increasingly affected by apparently unsolvable problems of Hunger and calmness but being two of the greatest pleasure of life eating and reading explains the fact that why food writing continues to be so popular and the craze and its development will probably never fade away or can never be stopped.

Origin of the Study

The research was taken up after the keen observation to make a connection and coherence of two different literatures and the displayable features of food and taste of the people depending on the literature, culture, beliefs, people and geological location.

Significance of the Paper

English has grown to be a universal language and Tamil a classical language in keen to the proposal of food literature and reflection of it is as significant as the topic. Food Literature is now an emerging genre in Literature and the importance of this is at a needy one. Food not only tastes the buds but also to our mind and soul in literature.

Food and Culture -Geographical Traces

Agricultural being unique it has its own traditions and rituals, its own cousins and dusting eating habits so it is with its food culture for example, unique methods, technological growth and harvesting practices are some traditional practices. Events involving food cooking and serving help define the social organisation and cultural identity of communities that give rise to listing literary traditions. The sentence evokes and a valence of memories and feelings and though are put in writings as food involves with all the other sense too besides the taste and smell.

There are five traditional landscapes of Kurinji (hills/mountains), Mullai (forests), Marutham (agriculture land), Palai (desert) and Neithal (coastal area) had divergent cooking methods, recipes and varied eating culture. Food in ancient Tamil society was based on the landscape and easily available resources. In ThiruvilayadalPuranam a classic work, it deals with a recipe called Pittu and to eat that Lord Shiva himself came down to earth says that great master piece. Literature usually projects food as a socio-cultural element but Tamil in an extraordinary manner and that could be supported in various ways.

The Meal, Culture in Respect to Religion

The portrayal of meals through literature as the union of individuals and as moments of light and warmth in the dark and cold is not uncommon the famous Christmas feast in Christmas carol by Charles Dickens perhaps is the best example where Scrooge clock family feast on the plum pudding and roast Turkey. A feast is not only an indicator of celebration of victory a successful marriage acceptor but also sucked sanity of a community does Shakespearean romantic comedy such in 'As you like it' and 'The Tempest' also comes close to it in relating to food and magic.

In Tamil literature 'Thanipadalthirattu' an anthology of poems the 32nd song goes like this -- 'Varaguarisichorum, vazhuthunangaivaatum, moramoravenapulithamorum...'
(steamedvaragu rice, smoked and mashed aubergine and tangy frothy buttermilk).
According to the Hindu belief system, food is considered a gift from God and is treated with respect and offered to God as nivedyam (sacred food offering) and then given to the devotees as prasadam. The nivedyam at Hindu temples are always the most admirable food that would taste brilliant. They are prepared at the temple by the priests after the food is offered to god and then it

is given to the devotees. As the priest enters the sanctum sanctorum with the nivedyam, he closes screen behind him in front of the devotees who are waiting to offer their prayers. For the next several minutes, the priest chants the mantras in Sanskrit/ classical language or regional language as he makes the ceremonial offering of food to god. Then he pulls off the screen or the door, and as the priest will conclude the rituals with oil lamps, sweet-smelling flowers, and the burning of camphor cubes, and fragrance sticks. The assistant of the priest will then walk out with a pot full of nivedyam with a few leaves on top and will provide it to the devotees waiting there. The tempting aroma of the neyyappam, (sweet rice cakes) and the subtle fragrance of neypaayasam (rice pudding sweetened with jiggery or sugar, and enriched with ghee) would pervade the air in front of the devotees. The nivedyam is then distributed to the devotees as prasadam (food that had been blessed).

Appam is the nivedyam at hundreds of Lord Ayyappa, Lord Ganesha, Lord Krishna, and Goddess Devi temples all over South India. Eating through the dark brown crust, crisped by rice flour and sugar, and the savoring the soft and chewy delicious middle of the appam is sheer delight. Customarily it is cooked in a bronze pan called appakara, about eight inches in diameter, with three or more large cavities, alike to an aebleskiver pan.

In Tamil Nadu both appam / adhirasam is made by deep frying a fermented batter. It is called by the name appe in south Karnataka and it is a must for Ganapathi puja. In Coorg situated in the southwestern Karnataka it is called as kajjaya. The Konkani community of Karnataka prepares it with semolina and either with jackfruit or banana and they call it Mulik. In Andhra Pradesh it is known as atrasalu or ariselu, and if it is deep browned in ghee it is called nethiariselu. It is served at many auspicious occasions and at weddings that marks a cultural ceremony.

On MattuPongal day, a festival celebrated in south India where women in the rural areas would get together and will set up sulliaduppu and will cook Kari, kozhi or eralchoru. The technique of cooking rice and meat together was in exercise even before the advent of Biryani.

The Feast as the Focal Point of Plot

Feast or an integral part of a literary work although the plots are based on the human tendencies of love, conquest, betrayal and loss rather than food the feast still it holds the path to be a flower crown on which a plot can turn inwork titled like Odyssey that discuss rivals right after the feast of the suitors. Food and social healing in Charles Dickens play a Christmas carol the character Ebenezer Scrooge a misery transforms after overlooking his clothes family feast on Christmas on that night Scrooge find the angles child of the family crippled and the family as a whole raising a toast to Scrooge even after his indifferent behavior.

Food in Sangam Literature

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 19:1 January 2019

Editors: Dr. V. Sangeetha, Dr. B. J. Geetha, Dr. K. Sindhu, Dr. S. Boopathi and Ms. S. Sneekha Sri

Food in Literature: Papers Presented in National Seminar on Food in Literature, 2019

S. Pavith, M.A. English Literature

Portrayal of Food in Select Works of Tamil and English Literatures

155

The literature of classical Tamil, that later became referred to as Sangam literature were graven on palm leaves and dates back to the amount between three hundred B.C. and three hundred AD. These heroic poems written in ancient Tamil diagrammatically describe life in south Republic of India below the Chera, Chola, and Pandya dynasties.

There are many classic works that would have the imminent portrayal of food in it, TamizharUnavu authored by BhaktavatsalaBharathi has a separate chapter called ‘food in Sangam age’ and enumerates the literary references. The Sangam literature also refers to the cooking methods like vakkuthal (direct fire cooking) that differed between regions. Direct fire cooking was predominant in the Kurinji and Mullai landscapes while, frying and sun-drying were common in the Palai and Neithal areas. It was in the Palai area (desert areas) that preserving methods like pickling were followed. In the agricultural fields of Marutham, the people chiefly boiled and steamed which has later developed into elaborate cooking methods that are followed in the modern era in technical terms.

Food in the Sangam Age to the common man ranged from ordinary to peculiar. Millets and grains like varagu, thinaisamai were main, there were also few dishes and food that were made only in special occasions.

- ***Sirupanatrupadai***

Couplets in Sirupanatrupadai indicate that people of the Marudham landscape (agriculture land) ate white rice with a thick pasty curry made of crab flesh and ridge gourd. It records forms of rice, meat, spinach, vegetables, dry cereal, pulses, cereals, legumes and pickles as staple within the diet. In Sirupanatrupadai a poem, a Panan (one who sings) who had received rich presents from the lord Nalliakodan meets a group of Panars traveling in very hot weather, and he acclaims that they go to his patron for help. He also tells them what food they will get from the people of various regions on the way and finally from the king.

In the seashore towns they will provide:

"Fishermen will give you aged liquor that their wives with sharp, spear-like eyes and pretty faultless faces that make the moon jealous, have prepared along with fried kulal fish cooked over akhil driftwood wood of sleeping camel's shape brought over by swollen waves"

In the hot wasteland they will be given:

"Women of the Eyitriyar race who stay in huts will be hospitable to you and will feed you rice and venison cooked in tamarind sauce"

In the agricultural tracts they will have:

“The sister of the farmer will serve cooked white rice balls made from rice finely pounded with an iron pestle, with a dish made of split-legged crabs”

Finally, when they reach the king’s palace he will get:

“He will give you toddy strong that stupefies like poison of snakes, and in golden plates that much surpass the morning sun that lights the sky, he will serve many dishes suited to your taste that are prepared according to the rules found in the treatise that a hero wrote whose chest was as broad as the snowy mount”*

- **Porunaratrupidai**

Porunaratrupidai describes how the Kurinji (hills/mountains) people or the people of Chola country ate roots and honey. Malaipadukadam accounts the dish called kozhambu made of jackfruit seeds, raw mangoes and tamarind extract that was eaten with bamboo rice and buttermilk. Perumpanatrupidai also records a recipe in which Varagu rice, lentils, tamarind pulp and broad bean seeds were cooked together. A poem in Porunaratrupidai, the poet Mudathama Kaniyar describes the royal lunch he was treated to in the palace of the Chola king. “Skewered goat meat, crisp deep-fried vegetables, rice and over sixteen forms of dishes are mentioned as a part of the lunch. Similarly, in Porunaratrupidai (one of the earliest poems in Pahtuppattu) the poet meets a wandering minstrel and directs him to his patron Chola king Karikalan. Foods and drinks offered to the bards by the king are described in the following lines:

“In the halls bejeweled, smiling, comely maids poured out from spotless golden vessels full like cheering rain much stupefying drink repeatedly. Knowing the time to eat, he urged me to eat cooked thick thigh meat of sheep that were fed arukam grass twisted as ropes and fatty, big pieces of meat roasted on iron rods. He gave more and more even when I refused them again and again; he served many tasty pastries in many shapes”

“One day the king begged us to eat cooked rice whose grains unbroken looked like jasmine buds, all the grains of the same size with no streaks and long like fingers along with curries mixed with roasted seeds staying with me sweetly”

- **Purananuru, Agananuru**

Purananuru reveals the cooking method that how meat was marinated in curd before cooking. The kinds of Paalsoru (milk rice) and Puliyoðharai (tamarind fried rice) find a mention in Agananuru, which also describes a hunting episode in which watchmen guarding millet fields in the Mullai (forest) region hunted wild boars and cooked the meat in direct fire. Agananuru indicates a recipe of tender pomegranate seeds fried in ghee that was a kind of nutritional supplement for vegetarians. Purananuru tags fish varieties such as Vilangumeen, Pothimeen,

Thelimeen and Valaimeen that are usually caught in the slush in agriculture fields during the harvest of paddy.

It may sound bizarre and shocking in today's contextual world, but it was once a popular food of the masses, for example, rat meat, squirrel meat.

- ***Natrinai***

A poem in Natrinai, brilliantly describes how the loving couple will be meeting under an age-old tree. Thalaivi (The lady love) asks an owl nesting in the tree to keep quiet and not disturb their private moment in return of which she promises the bird a return of meat fried in ghee that she affectionately cooked it for her love (Thalaivan). Similarly, Pattinapalai accounts the meat of tortoise and monitor lizards as food of the Neithal region people.

With the provided literary references, ancient Tamil society was largely meat-eating one. It was only in Marutham, the vegetables dominated the tray. However, there are few references to food in the royal palaces that were individual and different, songs in Purananuru discourse feasts served in the palaces as 'Arusuvai Virundhu''

- ***Pathuppattu***

Pathuppattu (The 10 Idylls) A compendium of 10 middle length poems is one of the oldest living Tamil poetry. The poems in Pathuppattu praise kings, valor, wars, generosity, loyalty, and gratitude. Poems describing the king's generosity provide graphic descriptions of food that he gave to the bards. Five of the poems in Pathuppattu are guide poems where one bard urges other bards to go to his generous patron for help. According to Tamil scholar Kamil Zvelebil, these guide poems are some of the oldest poems written from around the second to the third century A.D. These poems eloquently portray a sophisticated civilization that prevailed in south Bharat throughout the first centuries.

English Literature

“For those that love words and those that love food, the combination is heaven”.

I first learned how literary food could make my mouth water and tongue slurp like remembering how Edmund couldn't resist Turkish Delights and loved it that was not a matter of issue, but he was ready to betray his own siblings, how an author could make a sentimental treat sound so seductive. We do not need that much definite, but it's always pleasant to experience lovely language mixed with food. “Garnished with honey and puddings made of delightful creaminess.”

- **The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe**

The first reference of food in the novel is that when Lucy gets into Narnia and she meets a goat footed man called Tumnus offers her drink at his home this shows the culture and the importance of food not only in this world but also in an imaginative world like Narnia. The second reference is Turkish Delight offered by the White Witch to Edmund, he inhaled the Snow Queen's Turkish Delight and betrayed his siblings, the temptation of food and taste makes a man to such extend.

The third portrayal of food is when they are invited to the Beavers home and the feast provided there the cordial welcome and hospitality seems like we too have to make a visit there. The fourth reference is to show how the mystical creatures dance and celebrate the feast when Aslan is killed at the stone bench as per the agreement between Aslan and the White Witch. This represents that people get together and celebrate as a whole in reflecting the culture.

The last representation is that when Lucy brings back alive the wounded and dead people in the war using her Christmas gift which was a magic portion which is also a food or medicine to treat the wounded.

In this novel alone, there are many references to food and each time it represents different things and also provides the culture and taste of food to humans and the imagination of a fantasy world in comparison to the real world.

Turkish delight is actual a dish comprised of sugar, gelatin, water, and cornstarch, and it is commonly flavored with rosewater, lemon or mint however Narnia is an imaginative world but not the food described in it.

- **Green Eggs and Ham**

Green Eggs and Ham is a children's short story written by Dr. Seuss, The book contains only fifty words on a bet with Seuss' publisher that he will be able to write a book for children below 225 words (Cat in the Hat word count). The formula contains seven: ham, eggs, inexperienced coloring, oil. The green eggs are not liked by a strange creature where Sam-I-Am and Ham wanted it to taste it and they follow it everywhere and it finally had to taste it without any option and it also likes it, it could be connected to children who will not have their appetite full until they like the colour of the food and so it should not be judged by the colour but with the taste. Similarly, many healthy foods are rejected by children with such wrong judgment sometimes.

Little House On The Prairie

The Little House on the Prairie books by Laura Ingalls Wilder is a chiefwork of children's literature. Western Boundary dishes and desserts are an important part of the series, which led to a bonusand selling of cookbook that highlights many of the recipes just like this one called Snow Candy. It is made-up to resemble a snowy landscape with dark syrupy streams.

- ***Harry Potter And The Chamber Of Secrets***

Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets is a novel series by J.K. Rowling in which Aunt Petunia's violet pudding. Pudding may be a fashionable sweet at Hogwarts, however nobody will it up like auntie flower. Dobby drops the cake onto Mrs. Mason's head.

"Aunt Petunia's masterpiece of a pudding, the mountain of cream and sugared violets, was floating up near the ceiling. On top of a cupboard in the corner crouched Dobby."

Now, J.K. Rowling is not far across food in imagination most of the letters, gifts and announcement are done at dining or in the banquet table where they have their food and the variety of list stated in it would make the readers mouthwatering, she did not impart this recipe it is a traditional British dessert.

Conclusion

According to Careme, "when we no longer have good cooking in the world we will have no literature nor high and sharp intelligence nor friendly gatherings nor social harmony". We see food as an essential one in our day to day life but beyond that it's an art where everyone are not god cook but anyone could be a foodie, "There is no love sincerer than the love of food." says George Bernard Shaw.

Everything is an art as we could quote by George Santayana "The earth has music for those who listen." Similarly, it's only visible to those who can appreciate little things in life. The specialty of literature is different where not facts nut could add fats in it by food description. We are not only introduced to variety of food but also the culture and people, sometimes reading is the wider travel and it's true in this account. The food habit depends upon the geological location, climate, people and tradition.

Literature has never failed in portraying what is happening in the society where these literary pieces could be next to history in order to reflect the human society. There are many other literatures that could be compared but it's limited to Tamil and English Literatures' and particular works which have major food impact in the work.

"Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food." Says Hippocrates, where Tamil literature says, "Food is Medicine, Medicine is Food" (Unave Marunthu, Marunthe Unavu).

Works Cited

- Achaya, K.T. Indian Food: A Historical Companion. Oxford University Press 1994.
Chellaiah, J.V. Pattuppattu: Ten Idylls, Translated into English Verse. Colombo General Publishers. 1975.
Herbert, Vaidehi. Pathuppattu. Digital Maxim LLC. 2013.
Kanakasabhai, V. The Tamils Eighteen Hundred Years Ago. Higginbotham & Co. Madras 1904.
Sastri, K.A. Nilakanta. The Cultural History of the Tamils. K.L. Mukhopadhyay 1964.

S. Pavith, M.A. English Literature
Bharathiar University
Coimbatore
pavithvalsel@rocketmail.com