

FOOD AND CULTURE: TOWARDS AN APPRECIATION OF GASTRONOMIC TOURISM

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Abstract

The historical account of human beings' association with food is in fact a prolonged narrative of their cultural and social particularities, specific and pertaining to different timelines. Food has always been and remains even today, an integral part of all cultures. Man has always been in search of new explorations of tastes, experimenting with one food or the other. From earliest times, since time immemorial, primitive men (with no difference as to modern men even with the passage of time), were preoccupied with the twin problematic concerns i. e. how to be safe and how to protect himself from the hostile environmental conditions and also how to take up the risks of eating and being eaten. Accentuated by his omnivorous drive, primitive man's initial journeys in and around the place of his origin revolved around these incessant and relentless wanderings in search for food; a probe into what and what not is edible. Simply put, food has served as a means of man's attempt to survive, naturally, as without food, man's existence and survival becomes a non-debatable question. The article may be interpreted as a critical reviewing of the transitions and transformations that have complemented the growth and development of man-food affiliation; very precisely, the food-culture relationship with a special focus on Gastronomic Tourism.

Key Words: narrative, culture, problematic, omnivorous drive, existence, survival, Gastronomic Tourism
As Levi Strauss submits, cooking food using fire "is the invention which made human beings human." Food almost became synonymous with man's quest for survival. Hunting, (consequentially, consumption of raw food, especially meat and man's identity as a hunter-gatherer) thus, became the much sought after occupation of primitive men. Man's search for food thus became the saga of the most intricate facet of human existence. They improved in finding meat, looking for carrion and hunting, but also in finding roots, seeds, sprouts, eggs and anything else edible... The only way in which an animal with a large and demanding brain could survive is by using that brain for thinking about how to utilize a vast range of good foods to obtain maximum nutrition with least effort (Anderson, 2005).

When one traces the trajectory of the origin and evolution of mankind, one comes to the absolute understanding that primitive men tried many a way to live on in nature. One such notable strategy adopted by them during the Paleolithic Age, was the discovery of fire and thereby followed other tools and paths of invention and discovery. The discovery of fire was de facto his preliminary step to interact and be in communion with nature and also how to manipulate it and as such how to make the best out of it. It encapsulated a variety of purposes, like, shelter from wild animals, source of light, shield from darkness, alternative remedy for heat and so on. It also paved the way for all feasible advanced cultural emergences and expansions especially with relation to diet. It brought in its wake umpteen alterations and transformations in the future life of men. The forms of food generally fall into three main categories: roasted, boiled and smoked. As the story of evolution of the food goes, roasting was the initial form of cooking, deemed as natural. This form of cooking was one in which food got directly exposed to flame; food put on sticks was directly 'burned' (the ancient form of cooking now labelled as 'grilled'). The correlation and points of difference among these three forms of cooking were well studied and explained by Levi Strauss and is evident in the following lines. Smoking and boiling are different in terms of the nature of the intermediary element between fire and food, which is air or water. Smoking and roasting are differentiated by the greater or lesser role given air; and roasting and boiling are differentiated by the presence or absence of water. The boundary between nature and culture, that can be imagined as being parallel to the air axis or water axis, places roasting and smoking on the side of nature, boiling on the side of culture in terms of the means used; or smoking on the side of culture and roasting and boiling on the

side of nature in terms of the results (Levi Strauss, 1966). However, the idea of raw came to stand for everything natural while cooked became metaphorical of everything cultural and social. The act of cooking, thus, came to symbolize the slow and gradual transition from nature to culture and from nature to society. The very concept of food, from then onwards, came to stand for the cultural and social nature of human beings. Also, the selection of the type of food (what in other terms can be called as a selective diet; selective eating habits) to be eaten had never been an easy choice to be made. All kinds of thoughts over the selection of food went into whether the given edible substance is good or bad for him. The omnivore's dilemma comes into play each time we decide whether or not to eat a wild mushroom, but it is also involved in our less-primordial encounters with what is supposed to be edible: when we muse over the nutritional claims of a box in the cereal aisle; when we choose a diet to lose weight (low fat or low carb?); when we decide to try the new chicken nugget recipe at McDonalds; when we weigh the costs and benefits of buying organic strawberries compared with normal ones; when we choose to follow (or disobey) Kosher or Halal dietary rules; or when we decide if it is ethically defensible or not to eat meat (Pollan, 2006).

As mentioned earlier, this omnivores' dilemma should make one think (man, being an omnivore) whether of the variety of foods given, which can be eaten without risk? One should spend time and energy construing on the basis of what is good and what is bad. It is a premeditated observation that one faces two opposing emotions when in front of a food item that is new; something that has never been tasted before. Neophobia (anxiety of eating something unknown) and neophilia (urge to try something known) are the twin contrary emotions experienced by man when he sits to experiment something potentially edible. Every tradition and culture attempt to classify the world in terms of what can be eaten from what cannot be, and there are many elements of symbolic nature which, beginning from the physical body, direct towards a certain awareness of the body social, and vice versa. The foundational base for all these routes of grouping encompasses the notion of purity (in essence, pure and well prepared food). The modern method and style of living have highly resulted in more attention being given to the way people consume food. Owing to the hectic workload and busy schedule, more and more people are not able to cook food at home on a timely basis. As a result, they tend to go out and dine in restaurants. Food and the experimentation and exploration of its new varieties have become a major area of interest and focus in the field of tourism.

Currently and as always, one of the prime motives in the tourism industry is the search for endless good food experiences. Gastronomic tourism or Culinary tourism or Food tourism is a branch of tourism that looks into the specificities and particularities of food, its characteristic features, ways and methods of preparing and consuming it. The word 'gastronomy' is of Greek origin that literally means 'right way of eating.' Thus, in simpler terms, gastronomic tourism may further be interpreted as right ways and methods of understanding people's nutritional wants. As is known, both cultural and social developments influence the way people prepare and take in food. Gastronomy is often regarded more than a scientific discipline that examines the relations between food and culture encapsulating aspects of food like the biological, social, cultural, religious and so on. As gastronomy establishes a link between food and culture, it may also be interpreted as a vital part of cultural tourism. Gastronomic tourism is a recent form of cultural tourism that meets the demand of people related to the resource of food produces. It is often understood as a means of positioning of regional foods and also recovering the traditional tasty foods of each area. It has become one of the most flourishing and dynamic forms of tourism and has also acquired worldwide, greater importance during the last decades on account of the financial benefits yielded and also because of the social and cultural progress (as these in turn stimulate local, regional and national development) that have been achieved hitherto. Ever since its inception, gastronomic tourism has been a type of tourism in high demand and as a part of tourism is a means of income supporting the evolution of income in small and medium enterprises with culinary offer.

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