

Globalisation and Food Industry: Reflections from India Culinary Scenario

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Abstract—*Food sustains all kinds of life and food choices we know are among other things, determined by cultural choices. This paper tries to investigate new horizons in the food industry by attempting to understand it from the cooking side. First, it looks into the economy-side of Indian food industry and shows the correlations between the inflection points in Indian economy and changes in dietary patterns of Indians; second, it shows how globalization has produced new tastes and choices in different parts of the world, followed by a conclusion.*

Food choices are a direct result of the situation in the agriculture industry. For example, when during the colonial era, India had an acute paucity of food grains and repeated severe droughts and famines kept ravaging the population, Indian diet consisted mainly of coarse, unrefined grains like millets and wheat. With independence the government of India launched ambitious programmes of food self-sufficiency, mainly under the aegis of the 'Green Revolution' agenda. This made rice and wheat the staple grains of India. At the same time, government's National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) launched its flagship programme 'White Revolution' whose aim was augmentation of dairy production capacity through large-scale scientific intervention. This programme made India the largest dairy producer in the world and at the same time it made milk, butter, cheese, etc. widely available to Indians at government-controlled, affordable prices. The third vector along which the government aimed at food self-sufficiency was oilseed production. Through subsidies and scientific aid, the government encouraged widespread cultivation of oilseeds like mustard, which has been captured under the term 'Yellow Revolution'.

The next major leap came in the 1990's with the onset of Liberalization, Privatization, and Globalization (LPG). This era heralded in the removal of government controls from trade, opening up of markets, and India joining the WTO. Polished and processed food production took off in a big way in India. The consumer now wanted grains with more shelf-life.

Although India's share in international food trade is very low, it remains the world's second largest producer of food grains. The Indian food processing industry engages in a wide arena of work from processing of fruits and vegetables to milk products, fisheries, soybean, and grains, among others.

Because the cuisine industry caters to the evolving taste buds of varied kinds of customers, it requires constant experimentation and innovation. Here it is important to highlight that the cuisine industry professional needs to work behind the scenes with passion and acumen, keeping in mind the evolving tastes of people.

Globalization is the zeitgeist of our age. It encapsulates all aspect of human world today which means that we are globally connected also in terms of cuisine. Thus we see that food items that originate in one part of the globe can quickly go global. It has made the customs, ingredients, cooking methods, wines and other important aspect of each city or country exposed to global knowledge and trends.

Changing expectations of the people make us sit and think as how to innovate. The consumer has become more smart and demanding as he now knows what is being produced in other parts of the world. Keeping this in mind, the standards have to be improved each day. So whatever we produce locally is in competition with the same product being made everywhere else. People can easily switch to the best product from abroad if the local product doesn't satisfy his needs. What earlier was a super service is now considered basic and in order to make yourself better from competition you have to constantly upgrade and make yourself better.

The manpower concerns has changed as well, be it loyalty or any factor regarding the benefits all has rapidly increased. The staff expects fast growth as well as more remuneration each year. The technology has also changed and has been very beneficial for hotels. With speed and quality being the dominant mantra, everyone is making an endeavour to make themselves better.

The cuisine industry mainly caters to customers who want to break the monotony of daily food. These people have multiple places to choose from when it comes to eating out. The

industry operates under the burden of meeting this crucial need. Globalization of cuisine industry has its positives as well as negatives. It does make doing business a little more difficult. It has presented several religious, cultural as well as moral hurdles in the food industry because as we know that all people in the world have their own culinary strictures, rules, and taboos.

The cuisines around us has got so diversified and at the same time so ubiquitous that we seldom stop to think about it. Regional delicacies can be found in every menu, tastes and flavours of different regions know about no barriers. In every city, there are many restaurants which are based on international cuisine and the success of these restaurant are based on the foreign ingredients which are only available in the foreign market. Thanks to globalization, it is possible to procure those ingredients in local market.

The food scenario in India is also very skewed. On the one hand India has one of the highest rates of malnourishment in the world, at the same time it has an increasingly problem of people facing obesity due to excess fat and carbohydrates intake. The new middle class that has come up post-LPG in India has connected itself well to global health fads. As a result, it has become health conscious with regard to the quality of the food it eats. People now devote substantial attention to the calories, fats, proteins, carbs content of their foods. Diet versions of all kinds of foods are now popular in the market. Herbal teas and slimming food products (with low sugar and low fat) is the new rage. Gym culture has taken off in a big way with the result that gym-goers are very particular about what they eat and how much. The demand for customised food tailored to these needs has risen substantially.

The new globalised middle class family has started travelling around the world. In this way it is exposed to the foods of different geographies and climates. When they return home, they demand similar foods. Besides, exposure to the internet has given people a plethora of choices of where to travel and this has another important bearing for cuisine industry as people have the first thought of being ready to taste on new variety of foods. There are hundreds of blogs, and social media which have made people more aware about spices, cooking methods of various cuisines than ever before so that a Chinese delicacy made in an Indian home can hardly be distinguished from its native land. This has also made us adaptable in different customs than ever before.

Today cities in global era have a marked division of traditional versus contemporary. Food also contains glimpses of that. Let take an example of the National Capital Territory of Delhi, one gets to have the glimpse of walled city, samosas, jalebis, parathas, Mughlaifoods amongst others can be seen all over to have mouth watering effect but the platter changes entirely once we move down to the other parts of the city.

People of previous generations frequently recounted their culinary adventures in foreign lands. The scenario has changed

dramatically today. In the current times, one can get a taste of the French, Chinese, Italian, Mexican, Mediterranean, continental, Mexican foods in one go by using food ordering apps on their mobile phones. For example, the city of Ahmedabad in India once known for its dhoklas now is home to foods from various countries and the enterprising spirit of this city to keep pace with global mindset has made it all the more successful here. Globalisation thus exhibits a complex behaviour as cultural homogenization is working simultaneously along with breeding cultural diversity. New entrepreneurial options in food are being discovered. Of late, the idea of venture capital aiming for food starts ups to connect demand delivery services from local farms, invent new foods, meat and egg substitutes from plants are being explored.

With the rise in disposable incomes, the restaurant business has undergone a structural change. Families and friends have begun eating out together for the purpose of spending quality time together, where they have to spend less time on daily chores like cooking. Along with this is the fact that with the awareness generated by media, restaurant businesses have adapted to this new need and is able to cope with market challenges. Today the business players looking at this societal phenomenon often opt for a chain of restaurants in order to diversify their business portfolio. The new opportunities generated by idea of franchises further makes an interesting case with both sides making a sound profit, wherein the foreign player can reduce the overhead costs and the domestic player getting access to new business.

The global era is marked by speed. Food is also not spared here as we witness the rise of fast food culture with its readymade availability and quick consumption. Just a walk down the lane of any Indian market, one find the line-up, namely McDonald's, Burger King, Taco Bell, Subway, Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC). They may have been controversial in their mainland and often been victims of new claims by several ecologists and vegans, yet one cannot gloss over the fact that India has become a new home to them. This impact of global ethos on lives, culture of a common man can be summed up in what can be called as soft power.

Power is not only about hard material capacities to do things but also about capability to cast an influence over others in order to make them like our ways. Great powers in the world are not based on huge army, military might alone. Rather they also project a huge amount of their soft power. Power thus, is decentralised in realms which are close to people, namely food, music, technology amongst others. They cast an influence over our hearts and minds. The cultural attraction of a country can win over enemies without resorting to coercion.

It is quite exciting to find as to how the food sector has a huge latent potential to develop. It has further ventured out as a new arena for entertainment where eating out has become a regular feature in our lives. The changing consumption habits of

consumers and emergence of new players in the sector are essential to be factored in this growth saga.

India is a leader in food grains, fruits and vegetables, where food processing industry even gave a competition to other sectors like manufacturing. Today we have mega food parks and cold storage facility which has given a new boost to the sector. Unfortunately, there are reports which present stark facts like the food processing industries utilises less than half fund in the allocated plan. The need of the hour is to rectify this deficit.

Today's market condition suggest that one has to be judicious with expenses which does not means cost cutting, as it may drop down the quality. Rather 'managing the cost' is the term industry specialists use, which means that without compromising on quality the manufacturer can reduce the expenses by optimal utilization of resources. This enables to sustain during tough months and have consistency in the bottom line throughout the year.

The food industry needs to produce more and be prepared for peak demand seasons and on the other hand it has to control the supply when the quantum of business is low. Change is inevitable and it is the most important aspect of life. However, the silver lining in the cloud is that there are only benefits in change as it exposes one to more opportunities of learning and creating something better.

The generations coming ahead needs to have more patience and be the strong advocate of change management. Learning from experience is a very crucial skill which most of us ignore. It should be considered very important as it helps you learn for free.

The agrarian sector is seasonal in nature, impacted by monsoons, economic slowdown and mismatch between demand and supply which leads to food inflation. The tax structures in the India's food services industry such as excise and service tax, value added tax add to complexity of the problem. Reforms like better tax structure for guests, regulation of excise duties, controlling fluctuating market prices, support of government by providing better infrastructure, amongst others shall go a long way in aiding the food and cuisine industry.