

FOOD AND CINEMA: A GASTRONOMIC ANALYSIS OF DAAWAT-E-ISHQ

Sunny Kumar¹
Atanu Bhattacharya²

ABSTRACT

The conversation that surrounds food is frequently represented on screen in Indian films, and audiences have the opportunity to delight in watching a wide variety of food dishes being prepared for celebrations of various kinds. The kind of foods available are determined by the cultures that are being depicted and reflect the demographics of the region to which they belong. This paper investigates the ways in which food and scenes linked to food play a significant role in the well-known Bollywood film Daawat-e Ishq. It demonstrates the significance of food sequences in the movie by showing how they are utilized as a symbol to signal particular signs, to express emotions, and to show how the gastronomic delights of the city of Lucknow become the language of love for the protagonists.

Keywords: Cinema, Food, love, songs, Lucknow, symbols, Persuasion, communication

1. THE LANGUAGE OF FOOD

Food has served as a means of self-expression for numerous civilizations. Food often elicits both emotional and physical responses, as well as stimulating our sensory perception of the environment. This raises the question of how one may investigate the universality of food as a meaning-making category. Therefore, we cannot deem the manner in which individuals consume food, including who they dine with, the timing and content of their meals, and the organization of culinary traditions, as arbitrary. Instead, they possess inherent meanings that can be analyzed and offer insights into the individual's participation in these practices. These significations include several components that enable us to comprehend and use food as a practical instrument in our daily lives, derived from the integration of various cultural, social, economic, and political interactions. Consequently, every element within the realm of culinary tradition assumes the form of an extensive network wherein many meanings, thoughts, ideas, and practices deeply interconnect. We characterize these networks as "signifying" because they aid in our comprehension of reality and help us understand our cultural surroundings. As Isil Demir says in *The Language of Food Avers*:

Different cultures have different food practices, so in order to analyze them and gain insight, we can use semiotics as a valuable methodology. This aids in the interpretation of the significance of food and dishes, whether they are accidentally or purposefully crafted. Humans are continuously engaged in the process of semiosis, which entails the act of comprehending and attributing significance to the external world in which we exist. The inclusion of a diverse range of codes across cultures serves as the foundation for communication and social activities. Within these codes, food emerges as a significant element since it establishes a network of interrelated meanings. (*The Language of Food, MotaWord*)

We can view the signification and communication inherent in food as an interconnectedness of items within a culinary tradition, organized in systematic and non-random ways that establish codes. As per Umberto Eco's perspective, quoted in *Food and Communication* by Dr. Fabio Parasecoli:

There is a signification system (and therefore a code) where there is socially conventionalized possibility of generating sign-functions whether the functives of such functions are discrete units called signs or vast portions of discourse, provided that the correlation is posited by a social convention. There is, on the contrary, a communication process when the possibilities provided by a signification system are exploited in order to physically produce expressions for many practical purposes. (Parasecoli, 2011)

In the film *Daawat-e-Ishq*, Food evokes themes of love, emotions, and sentiments that shape the structuring of characters. For studying this film through the lens of food the theoretical framework used here, draws upon the semiotic concepts proposed by Roland Barthes.

¹Research Scholar, Department of English Studies, Central University of Gujarat, India

²Professor, Department of English Studies, Central University of Gujarat, India.

In his seminal work *Elements of Semiology*, first published in France in 1964, the author articulates the following viewpoint:

We shall therefore postulate that there exists a general category language/speech, which embraces all the systems of signs; since there are no better ones, we shall keep the terms language and speech, even when they are applied to communications whose substance is not verbal. (Barthes,1964)

According to John Fiske's *Introduction to Communication*, Saussure's theories regarding the paradigmatic and syntagmatic relationships of signs provided limited insight into their functioning. His primary focus was on the linguistic system and its connection to reality, with little emphasis on its relationship to the reader and their socio-cultural situation. Saussure, in other words, did not perceive meaning as a process of interaction between the writer or reader and the text. He prioritized the textual content over the user's cultural and personal experience without considering the interaction between the signs in the text and the user's background. Furthermore, he ignored the interaction between the text conventions and the user's anticipated conventions. Roland Barthes was the first to establish a methodical framework for analyzing the concept of meaning as a dynamic and interactive process. Therefore, Barthes's theory revolves around the concept of two orders of signification. (Fiske, 2010)

For Barthes, the first order of signification is the one that Saussure proposes, rooted in the signifier and signified. Barthes uses the term "denotation" to describe the order. This pertains to the self-evident and straightforward interpretation of the sign. Connotation, as defined by Barthes, refers to one of the three methods by which signs operate at the second level of signification. It refers to the interaction that occurs when a sign intersects with its users' emotions and cultural values. During this process, meanings tend to shift towards the personal, or at least the shared understanding among individuals. In this scenario, both the interpreter and the object or sign itself influence the interpretation of the sign. (Fiske, 2010) The critical factor in this, according to Barthes, is the visualization of the sign that is the signifier in the first order of signification. Hence, connotations may be more social or less personal, as they are mostly random and unique to one society, but they often have memorable qualities. Because it works on an emotional level, we are often unaware of it.

Barthes defines myths as signs that operate in the second order. A myth, according to Barthes, is a narrative through which a society elucidates or comprehends a certain facet of reality or the natural world. Primitive myths revolve around fundamental themes such as existence and mortality, the relationship between humans and deities, and the dichotomy between morality and immorality. According to Barthes, a myth is a culture's cognitive framework for comprehending and interpreting anything. This can be represented as follows:

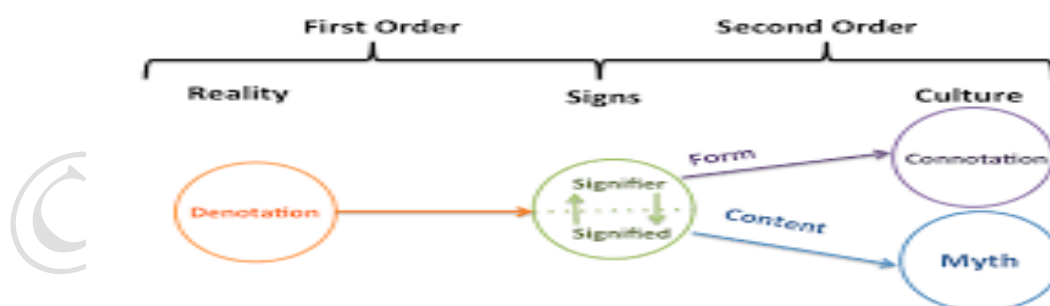


Figure Source: Google Images; Barthes's two orders of signification. In the second order, the sign system of the first is inserted into the value system of culture (p. 88).

Barthes extends the semiotic structures to a wide range of things, including clothing and food, among others. Thus, we can view food as a mode of communication that, unlike verbal expression, relies on semiotic indicators of cultural practices, as observed by Barthes. According to Barthes, we can understand food as a "signifying system" or an "alimentary language" that encompasses the following:
 - rules of exclusion (food taboos), signifying oppositions of units, the type of which is still unknown (for example, sweet or savoury); rules of association, which can happen at the same time (for a dish) or one after the other (for a menu); rituals of use that may serve as a form of gastronomic rhetoric.

(Barthes) Rules (i), (ii), and (iii) are the signifying systems of food, which show the binary codes indebted to Levi Strauss, but the rule of rhetoric is something that Barthes considers to be determined by an individual or a large group practising it rather than the small or deciding group. (Barthes, n.d.)

According to Dunne and Lewis' research, we can understand Barthes' concept of the language of food, as described in his *Elements of Semiotics*, as a menu consisting of "systems" and the dishes within it carrying specific "meanings." Each item on a menu, such as appetizers, salads, and desserts, is assigned certain placements and carries specific meanings. The selected individual dishes within a meal function as "syntagms," which are perceived as interconnected meanings rather than overarching units of meaning. Therefore, these individual dishes convey significance in a manner similar to words inside a sentence. Furthermore, personal preferences, culinary techniques, and eating habits are regarded as "idiolects." Hence, simplifying food to its fundamental nature conveys a sign, primarily acting as the signifier and the signified, thereby establishing a connection between the two concepts. However, it is important to note that food and language are not synonymous when examined collectively. Barthes posits that we can understand culture as a myth, language as a myth, and food as a language. This perspective leads him to posit that different human actions can be seen as variants of a singular subject known as "word." (Dunne and Lewis, n.d.)

In his critique of modern-day "mythologies," Barthes (1957) highlighted the ideological meaning of food, citing several examples from the food universe. Barthes defines myth as a higher-order semiotic system, specifically a meta-language that can establish certain worldviews by transforming signs into signifiers that can lead to new meanings. Various dynamics undeniably deeply influence food, not only through its national or exotic connotations (e.g., wine, fries, and other iconic symbols of French culture), but also through its visual appeal (e.g., ornamental cuisine) and customs. In addition to Barthes, several scholars, like Levi-Strauss and Mary Douglas, have highlighted food's significant role in reflecting and modelling specific systems of values and meanings. (Stano, n.d.)

Therefore, Barthes employs new terms for signifier, signified, and sign in the connotative sense to distinguish them from those used by structuralism and semiotics. So, he uses form for signifier, concept for signified, and signification for sign. These new terminologies have the same meaning as structuralism. Therefore, the paper uses these three new terminologies: form, concept, and signification.

2. FOOD AND CINEMA

Prominent historical and cultural influences shape the visual representation of food in film. Post-war Neorealist filmmakers drew inspiration from the adversities that arose after World War II, resulting in stylistic techniques that meticulously portrayed the lives and actions of the working class. The encounter with societal suffering has an impact on the artistic and narrative decisions pertaining to food, particularly in relation to visual and storytelling techniques. Moreover, the cultural and political context of film creation, dissemination, and consumption significantly shaped the representation of food in the cinematic medium. The use of food as a social metaphor in films serves to illustrate the symbolic and metaphorical significance that eating behaviours frequently have within cinematic tales. This observation allows for the examination of evolving social interdependencies and transformations in cultural identity. Moreover, the rise of food films as a separate genre has prompted the examination of topics such as identity, authority, culture, social status, spirituality, and interpersonal connections through the medium of food. These effects have played a significant role in enhancing our comprehension of the interdependent relationship connecting situations of life and food in the realm of cinema, thereby emphasizing the significant effect of food on cinematic plots and the perceptions of viewers.

Therefore, the incorporation of food within cinema has undoubtedly developed over time, emerging as a noteworthy component in cinematic culture. *The baby's breakfast*, produced by the Lumière brothers was the first study of food that underscores the historical importance of integrating ordinary actions such as eating into cinematic storylines. It was produced inside the boundaries of the Lumière family's own garden and prominently showcased Auguste Lumière, the brother of Louis Lumière, as

its main protagonist. It portrays Auguste Lumière participating in the act of eating in the company of his spouse and their teenage daughter. The film is also recognized as *Repas de bébé* (*Feeding the baby*) or *Le Déjeuner de bébé* (*The baby's lunch*). The film primarily focuses on the issue of food, skillfully incorporating the act of eating within the context of cinematic depiction. The Lumière brothers embarked on an investigation of the capabilities of their apparatus by shooting film in an improvised way, with special focus on the viability of capturing a fleeting instant of reality via the medium of a moving image. This prominence of food in one of the first films in the history of cinema may not be coincidental.

It was during the early stages of development of silent films, distinct cinematic genres such as the western, slapstick humour, and horror were intricately associated with the representation of food and consumption. However, early attempts to capture food on film faced technological difficulties due to the lack of colour and sound. According to Davide Spinelli's work, *The connection between Food and Cinema*, Zimmerman points out, the portrayal of food in visual media mostly consisted of monochromatic imagery, without any associated audio components. As a result, these scenes were distinguished by their limited presence and their incapacity to effectively communicate metaphorical symbolism (Spinelli, 2020). Further Spinelli talks about Zimmerman's analysis, that comedians included food components in their films largely to elicit visual humour, prioritizing the humorous impact above the culinary side.

The proliferation of food images in films throughout the 1960s was made possible by breakthroughs in film production methods and a growing interest in gastronomy. Julia Child, an American woman, converted her personal passion for culinary arts into a lifetime endeavour, culminating in her successful completion of studies at the prestigious French gastronomic school, Le Cordon Bleu, in 1951. The book titled *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*, published by Child, was formally launched in the United States in 1963. This culinary treatise has had a significant impact on the field. The cookery programme known as *The French Chef* was launched by WGBH in February 1963. Julia Child's modest and genuine culinary presentations effectively conveyed the idea that cooking is a pleasurable pursuit. Additionally, her approach to French Food achieved a sense of familiarity without losing its fleeting gourmet charm and flavour. (Drzał-Sierocka, 2015)

Steve Zimmerman argues that the alteration in the portrayal of food in films was shaped by the renewed fascination with gastronomy and culinary practices. Food began to exhibit a heightened occurrence in visual media and acquired a meaning beyond its function as a simple theatrical prop or set decoration. The genre of the food film is characterized by a specific classification of films in which the portrayal of food and its consumption plays a significant part in both the plot and narrative framework. These films not only use food and eating as visual elements but also employ them as integral components that influence the development of characters, their interpersonal connections, the communication of emotions, and the establishment of the cinematic universe. In her study, Ann Bower outlines the essential characteristics of a food film as follows:

The camera will focus on food preparation and presentation so that in close-ups or panning shots, food fills the screen. The restaurant kitchen, the dining room and/or kitchen at home, tables within a restaurant, a shop in which food is made and/or sold, will usually be central settings. And the film's narrative line will consistently depict characters negotiating questions of identity, power, culture, class, spirituality, or relationship through Food (Bower, 2012, pp 5-6).

3. FOOD AND INDIAN CINEMA

The intricate and profound nature of the relationship between Bollywood and cuisine in Indian culture is evident. Food serves a multifaceted purpose beyond mere nutrition, as it functions as a medium for the expression of emotions, the display of cultural diversity, and the cultivation of interpersonal bonds among characters. Indian cinema adeptly employs food as a symbolic representation of culture, tradition, and societal values, hence establishing it as a prominent thematic element in numerous films. According to Neerja Bhatnagar's writing, *Bollywood and Food: Exploring the Relationship Between*

Food and Indian, the food being served in films becomes a cultural symbol in diverse cinematic narratives, functioning as a means of cultural identification, mirroring shifts in society, eliciting sentiments of nostalgia, and fostering a sense of unity. The incorporation of visual elements in Bollywood films enhances the sensory encounter, rendering it visually fascinating and compelling. Furthermore, the depiction of Food in Indian cinema has played a significant role in fostering food tourism, stimulating professional aspirations, and functioning as a promotional instrument for food-centric merchandise. (Bhatnagar, 2023)

Therefore, the combination of Bollywood and Food highlights the importance of culinary customs in Indian civilization, demonstrating how food goes beyond basic nourishment to become a potent means of storytelling, cultural portrayal, and social unity. According to Sikha Bajaj's work, *Why Bollywood Cinema Would Starve without Food: A Study of the importance of food in Bollywood films BA Film Studies*, Lalit Mohan Joshi in his book *Bollywood: Popular Indian Cinema* describes in the context of Indian cinema, that the comprehensive examination of the use of songs, dances, and everyday objects including dress and food communicates symbolic meanings that are used to convey complex intellectual emotions within Bollywood films. (Bajaj, n.d)

According to Olivelle. P (1995), Indian cuisine is often regarded as a manifestation of the cultural legacy of the country, including historical connections to its inception. The function of food has undergone a transformation that extends beyond its primary function of maintaining human existence. Instead, it has assumed a significant part within the customs and rituals of many religious and cultural communities, hence fostering intercultural interaction and discourse. The culinary traditions of India play a crucial role in the cultural and social identity of people, as they provide insights into their geographical origins and religious affiliations. This is mostly due to the vast diversity of states and regions within the nation. Therefore, the proverb "you are what you consume" is very applicable within the framework of Indian society.

Gigy J. Alex and Babitha Marina Justin's writes in their article *Slamming the Door: Reinventing Kitchen Narratives in Contemporary Indian Movies* that the utilization of gastronomic spaces in Indian films serves to critically examine gender, social identity, and feminine spaces through the reworking and questioning of conventional conceptions of kitchen spaces as patriarchal frameworks. The cinematic works *Stanley Ka Dabba (2011)*, *The Lunchbox (2013)*, *Kaaka Muttai (2015)*, *Aamis (2019)*, and *The Great Indian Kitchen (2021)*, portray kitchens as environments that include both oppressive and uplifting qualities, thereby illuminating the gendered roles and power dynamics inherent in the processes of food preparation and consumption. These films consistently examine and question the gender roles and performances that are common in Indian kitchens, revealing the contradictory nature of the kitchen as both a creative environment for women to showcase their culinary abilities and as a space where women are compelled to carry out mundane tasks. Cooking, historically linked to women's artistic manifestation, is depicted as a ceremonial and theatrical practice, while kitchen environments are portrayed as confinement for women. Moreover, the portrayal of food in these films serves as a delectable symbol that delves into significant social, political, and gender matters, influencing the formation of individuals' identities, altering their recollections, and questioning established power structures and dominant influences. Hence, Indian films employ culinary settings as a means to scrutinize and explore the constructs of gender, identity in society, and feminine spaces, hence providing a stimulating perspective for analyzing these intricate societal matters. (J. Alex & Justin, 2023)

Sabrina Ciolfi's article, *Food and fasting: Representing the traditional role of women in Hindi cinema* points out that the correlation between food and films in Indian cinema has received less scholarly attention in comparison to Western cinema. Although food is not a prominent focal point in Bollywood films, it does manifest itself in diverse manifestations, including cinema titles, song lyrics, and scenes portraying the process of food preparation. There has been a recent trend in commercial Hindi films to depict youthful, urban, upper-class characters who display contemporary views in technologically sophisticated kitchens. Certain male heroes assume the position of a chef, thereby exemplifying the contemporary popularity associated with this occupation like Shahrukh Khan in *Duplicate(1998)*, Saif

Ali Khan in *Salaam Namaste*(2005), R Madhavan in *Ramji Londonwaley*(2005), Amitabh Bachhan in *Cheeni Kum*(2007), and Akshay Kumar in *Chandni Chowk to China*(2009), and Aditya Roy Kapur in *Daawat-e-Ishq*(2014), also many other male actors have played the role of being a chef in Indian films. Nevertheless, food generally does not assume a prominent role as the primary subject of the film. (Ciolfi, 2018)

This interplay between films and cuisine within the context of Indian culture is characterized by a multitude of dimensions and intricate dynamics. This observation underscores the significance of Food within Indian civilization, highlighting its role as a representation of customs, culture, and identification. Indian films have also used food as a means to exhibit a wide range of Indian culinary traditions. In cinematic productions such as *The Hundred-Foot Journey*(2014), *Chef*(2014), and *Daawat-e-Ishq*(2014), food has a prominent role, with the narrative revolving around the conception and admiration of culinary creations. These films not only exhibit the many categories of Indian cuisine but also emphasize the significance of Food in Indian heritage and way of life.

4. DAAWAT-E-ISHQ: A GASTRONOMIC ANALYSIS

Daawat-e-Ishq, also known as “*Feast of Love*,” is a romantic comedy film released in 2014 in the Hindi language. It was directed by Habib Faisal and was produced by Aditya Chopra’s Yash Raj Films. The main actors in the film are Parineeti Chopra, Aditya Roy Kapur, and Anupam Kher. Sajid–Wajid wrote the soundtrack. Parineeti Chopra's character, Gulrez “Gullu” Qadir, resides in a lower-middle-class Hyderabadi mohalla and is employed as a shoe saleswoman at a mall, having aspirations of moving to the United States. She resides with her father “Abdul Qadir” (Anupam Kher), who is seeking a suitable partner for her but lacks the financial means to provide a substantial dowry. Gullu's optimism and humour are unaffected by this. While searching for her ideal partner, she develops romantic feelings for Amjad (Karan Wahi), and they decide to wed. The request made by Amjad's parents for a dowry of Rs. 80 lakhs leads to a breakdown in the marriage negotiations. Fueled by anger, Gullu intends to apprehend a groom who is greedy for dowry, utilizing IPC 498A (dowry act) as a means to retrieve a substantial sum of money from him in order to realize her aspiration of relocating to America.

The protagonist, accompanied by her father, goes to Lucknow under fabricated personas, where they successfully apprehend Tariq “Taru” Haider (portrayed by Aditya Roy Kapur), the owner of the esteemed establishment “Haidari Kebab”. They select Tariq as their objective and covertly document the entire exchange when Tariq's parents demand a dowry from Abdul. Over the course of the three days preceding the wedding, Taru and Gullu become acquainted with one another, leading to Gullu’s growing affection for Taru. Surprisingly, Taru generously provides her with Rs. 40 lakhs in cash from his personal resources, as requested by his father as a dowry. In this manner, Taru’s father is able to uphold his promise. Furthermore, the act of Gullu’s father presenting Taru’s father with the sum of 40 lakhs would not be considered a genuine dowry.

Gullu remains committed to her plan of giving pills to Taru on the night of their marriage and disappears with all the money. Additionally, she obtained an additional 40 lakhs from Taru's family through law after filing accusations under section 498A. Taru intends to seek justice upon uncovering her true identity. Simultaneously, Gullu and Abdul commence their preparations for migration to America. Gullu experiences shame and guilt for deceiving an honest person and resolves to reimburse the full amount of the money. Upon arrival at the railway station, Gullu encounters Taru as they prepare to embark on a train journey to Lucknow. Gullu reimburses all of the money and openly declares her affection for him. They come together and organize a genuine wedding ceremony devoid of any dowry. Following that, Amjad becomes aware of his mistake upon viewing their wedding film and directly confronts his parents on their demands for dowry. Finally, Gullu, at the end of the film, opens a footwear store.

5. FOOD AS A TOOL FOR PERSUASION

The film used food at strategic points of the narrative. Gullu, after meeting Amjad’s parents, gets disheartened with their demand for dowry. Hence, the use of the rules in Section 498A of the Indian

Penal Code, which deals explicitly with dowry-related crimes, to extract a large amount of money from the potential groom is formulated at this juncture. To bring her plan to fruition, Gullu successfully convinces her father to implement her plan by accompanying him to his preferred restaurant for an evening meal. Additionally, she proceeds to request his preferred cuisine, prompting her father to humorously remark, “*Booji ke favourite restaurant ka favourite khaana ka anaesthesia de kar fir surgery karenge*” (Father’s favourite restaurant, favourite food is like anaesthesia before the surgery). Following this, she reveals her intention to involve him, which prompts him to inquire, “*Dinner ka rishwat dekar tum apna danger plan pass karwane laayi ho humein yahan?* (Are you bribing me with this dinner to execute your dangerous plan?)” Here food becomes the symbol of Persuasion that is communicated through the food offered by Gullu to her father.

Another scene where food becomes a mode of Persuasion is when Gullu gets annoyed by Tariq’s presence in her room in the hotel, after their little fight at his restaurant. In anger she calls the reception and wants them to throw Tariq out of her room. He then employs a similar persuasive tactic related to the kebab he just offered to Gullu by stating, “*bas kuch nahi kebab khilane aaye thay, waise bahar, biryani, sheermal, korma, phirni and papa mummy bhi aaye hain.*” (nothing, just came to offer you some kebabs; and by the way there are biryani, sheermal, korma, phirni along with mummy and papa, waiting outside). He hence entices her by wafting the aroma of his delectable kababs and other food delicacies of Lucknow that he has prepared and as result her anger subsides with that first bite of the kebab, which her father also enjoys while they listen to Tariq. Later, they are presented with an extensive dastarkhwan which is wrapped up with the offer of *shahi tukda* as a concluding gesture.

These two scenes in the film highlights the inherent emotional nature of human beings and underscores the significance of acknowledging the impact of our emotional states on our cognitive evaluations. Hence, it shows that one of the factors contributing to the phenomenon of enhanced Persuasion is the consumption of food.

The food here thus becomes a tool to communicate the intentions of the characters Gullu and Taru, which words could not have done easily. Food then becomes ‘symbolic’ of ‘persuasion’ in these two scenes. In the two scenes, foods like kebab, biryani, baingan ka saalan, qorma, and shahi tukda are not merely delicacies of Lucknow and Hyderabad but rather are ‘images’ that carry meanings. The dinner back in Hyderabad for Gullu’s father by her at his favourite restaurant connotes a “bribe”, and she uses it to convince him to get him involved in her plan as she is disgusted with all the greedy prospective grooms demanding huge dowries. Food thus, becomes a perfect option to gain that power to communicate this plan of her. Here, according to the second order of signification, Gullu’s plan becomes the form, and the concept of food served to her father is used. She uses his favourite dishes and restaurant to convince him, and this Persuasion creates the significance that Barthes talks about.

On the other hand, Taru, just to prove his intentions and to get the attention of Gullu, uses food as a form of communication to convey his intention. Kebabs, Biryani qorma and shahi tukda become the mode of communication in their entire conversation in the hotel room. And when these are served on the dastarkhwan they serve as the concept, as they appear in their physical forms luring the taste buds of the father and daughter duo but these delicacies connotes why Taru was there to meet them. It was his intention to convince them for marriage and reconsider his proposal for Gullu. As Kevin George points out in his essay, *Of Wine and Steak: Reading Gustatory Signs/Signifiers in Roland Barthes’* that, Barthes examines the French preoccupation with wine and its representation of wealth in his 1957 publication, ‘Wine and Milk’. He contends that red wine possesses a tenacious quality as a totem and alchemical substance, which can boost moods and alter awareness and behaviour, producing philosophical power. (George, 2023)

Thus, the food offered in these two particular scenes in the film conveys more than just its inherent quality of offering nourishment but symbolizes “persuasion” apart from the hospitality that Lucknow delivers through its exquisite and sophisticated culinary creations where food becomes a “system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations and behaviours.” (George, 2023)

6. COMMUNICATION OF LOVE THROUGH FOOD

The film is well known for its gastronomic features and the love between the characters Gullu and Taru. Food in this film is repeatedly symbolic of communicating the character's inner-self and emotions. As the word 'gastro semantics' was introduced by R.S. Khare describes the significance attributed to Food within Indian culture. He highlights the significant role that food plays in communication and symbolism. It is argued that food possesses the capacity to represent a diverse range of emotions, experiences, situations, social positions, identities, societies, communities, and beliefs. (Khare, 1992).

In the film, the song "Daawat-e-ishq" showcases Tariq Haider's sympathetic character and his romantic feelings for Gullu. This is shown through the use of various images of Lucknowi's delicacies that are presented to her. This exemplifies the use of convention in the film, which serves as a means to create widely recognized socio-cultural standards. Here, food represents that convention. They often serve to influence the perception of viewers about a persona or an event.

Kausar Munir is the lyricist of the song, with Sajid-Wajid providing the music, and Javed Ali and Sunidhi Chauhan are the singers. The duration is five minutes and twenty seconds. The song takes place at Taru's restaurant. He is seen expressing his amorous fascination with Sania while catering to his clients. The song's lyrics are composed with references to culinary customs as he utilizes a diverse array of spices and culinary materials in order to create a wide selection of dishes. Additionally, they employ various cooking utensils to generate a harmonious rhythm that evokes a gourmet ambience. The integration of aural and visual stimuli generates a cohesive experience for all customers, including Gullu, in the restaurant, promoting the appreciation of both the musical performance and culinary products.

It is important to note that the musical component serves not only as a source of emotional nourishment but also as a means of expressing affection through the tangible medium of food. The lyrics state, "*Dil ne astrakhan bichhaya, draw at e ishq hai, (heart has spread its tablecloth of love, as it is a feast of love),*" which can be interpreted as the heart has arranged the table for a feast of love. Within this particular context, the act of offering food serves as a symbolic gesture denoting affection and admiration towards the individual for whom the food is intended. The composition consists of distinct segments that centre around the process of preparation, presentation, and the olfactory impact of various dishes such as Biryani, kababs, nihari, and others. These elements collectively contribute to the sensory gratification experienced by the viewers as they visually perceive the delectable array of culinary delights. The presentation is designed to evoke a sense of aesthetic appeal, captivate the audience's attention, and effectively immerse them in the depicted scenario, thus creating a temporal and spatial experience for the viewers. The concept of food possesses a strong allure, such that its visual representation promptly constructs a fictitious scenario within the minds of the viewers, evoking a sense of being transported to a location abundant with delectable culinary offerings. Individuals experience a physiological response of hunger while observing visual depictions, and they form cognitive associations between the portrayed character's facial expressions and reactions, which convey a deep engagement with appetizing food.

This central theme of the song revolves around the expression of love and affection towards an individual through the medium of food, aligning with the popular adage, 'The way to a person's heart is through their stomach.' In this context, Gullu is depicted as having perceptively acknowledged Taru's emotions and endeavours directed towards her. The song serves to build the nascent connection between the individuals, wherein food has a key role that significantly influences their relationship. The musical composition commences with the percussive sound produced by the tapping of forks, gradually incorporating the tapping of plates, which elicits a notable auditory impact. When Taru's character taps on the plate, the auditory experience transitions from a diegetic sound to a non-diegetic one, characterized by a shift in tone to one reminiscent of rock guitar. The individual exhibits dynamic and agile behaviour, transitioning between various tables, whereby one can observe content patrons and an array of delectable and visually appealing culinary offerings. These movements additionally provide insight into the spatial context in which the song is being recorded. The songwriter centres the restaurant and its cuisine as the primary motif of the composition, thereafter articulating his affection

for both the culinary offerings and the female protagonist. The camera exhibits rapid motions, avoiding the use of static shots in order to accentuate the dynamic nature of the song. These swift camera movements effectively traverse the physical environment in tandem with the actor.

In the initial instance of its appearance, the title *Daawat-e-Ishq* is introduced by Taru, who directly engages with the audience through the screen, extending an invitation to partake in the cinematic voyage he is about to embark upon within the film. In the subsequent instance, the individual endeavours to serenade her in the company of others, employing a vegetable cart as a means of transportation. This utilization of the cinematic space is executed to its maximum potential, as the frame consistently maintains a sense of fullness. This characteristic can be understood as a reflection of the overall urban lifestyle. The video exhibits a continuous process of food preparation in the backdrop, accompanied by smoke permeating the screen. This visual element contributes to the overall aesthetic of the song while also portraying the culinary traditions prevalent in the streets of Lucknow. (Guha, 2023)

According to Barthes's second order of signification, the subsequent scene depicts Gullu entering the hotel premises, where a lavish assortment of culinary delights is being presented, comprising the quintessential elements of Lucknow's gastronomy, deeply rooted in the local culture. The cuisine exhibits vibrant and palatable qualities acting as signifiers or forms, and it also possesses a profound historical background that is crucial for comprehending the cultural milieu of the narrative situated within the city of Lucknow. The dancers are engaged in a choreographed performance, gracefully moving in a circular pattern around Gullu while delicately balancing platters laden with an assortment of dishes. This suggests that food, being the concept here, serves as a means of expressing affection and also functions as a consistent aesthetic component that communicates the distinctiveness of a particular environment, emphasizing the broader cultural customs associated with the cuisine. Similar to a well-crafted culinary experience, the musical composition culminates with a concluding segment, including Taru, who presents a dessert called phirni, and Gullu seems to be captivated by both his gestures and culinary offering and accepts it. The offering of Phirni also suggests or produces a meaning that, according to popular Indian beliefs, is based on the idea that before starting something new, something sweet needs to be offered so that this sweetness of the food remains alive in the relationship. Food performs This mythopoeic function in the scene, creating both a cultural norm and giving it a new meaning.

The film, however, explores several social challenges, that is the demand for dowry for marriage and showing men in the kitchen premises as earlier in most films like *Hum Saath Saath Hain* (1999), *English Vinglish* (2012), culinary spaces where part of women's life and men in the kitchen were seen as doing mere experiment or showcasing their talent in cooking. Also, in the film, we see men as 'nurturers,' which is again always associated with women. Hence, the film addresses these aspects of society by incorporating food as a significant element of the story structure. A limited number of Indian films prominently feature food as a central element within their plot, and *Daawat-e-Ishq* is among this exclusive group.

Hence, the film makes use of the culinary delicacies from Lucknow, known for their refinement and elegance, to influence the other characters, such as Gullu's attempt to impress her father in Hyderabad and Taru's use of persuasive tactics to convince Gullu during their discussion at the hotel successfully. In addition, he uses food to demonstrate his affection for her, and she, in turn, reciprocates by consuming a spoonful of phirni at the song's conclusion. Therefore, this connection between them is established through the act of consuming food, which becomes the basis for her trust. Taru's culinary expertise demonstrates a profound sense of fondness and concern towards her.

According to Roland Barthes, Food serves as a means of expressing different emotions, as he suggests that food and language are interconnected because they both involve the use of the tongue. Although food is a non-verbal form of communication, it has the ability to evoke memories of one's mother, childhood, or past experiences. It serves as a means to convince someone of anything and also to express love, desires, and many aspects of life. Barthes considers that food communicates at two levels: denotative and connotative. Furthermore, its connotative essence denotes the significance of the meal

being consumed, offered, and prepared. In the film *Daawat-e-Ishq*, Gullu successfully convinces her father to support her plan by using his favourite meal. On the other hand, in Lucknow, Taru manages to calm down her fury. Additionally, he uses many culinary delights of the city of Lucknow as a means to convey his affection and elicit reciprocal feelings from Gullu, all without explicitly expressing his love. Therefore, Gullu, who was always searching for an individual proficient in English and well-educated, unexpectedly encounters Taru, who, despite a lack of formal education, has extensive knowledge of the culinary arts and effectively communicates via his exceptional cooking talents. Hence, Gullu's search for someone with linguistic skills transforms into a gastronomic language of communication through food.

REFERENCES

- Bajaj, S. (2019). *Why Bollywood Cinema would starve without Food A study of the importance of Food in Bollywood films BA Film Studies*. Unpublished Dissertation. Lancaster University
- Barthes, R. (1968). *Elements of Semiology*. Hill & Wang.
- Bhatnagar, N. (2023). *Bollywood and Food: Exploring the Relationship Between Food and Indian Cinema*.
- Bower, A. L. (2012). *Reel Food*. Routledge.
- Cioffi, S. (2018). *food and fasting: Representing the traditional role of women in Hindi cinema*. Semantic Scholar. 293-304. <https://doi.org/10.13130/2611-8785/310729>
- Drzał-Sierocka, A.(2015).*Celluloid Flavours. A Brief History of Food in Film. Łódzkie Studia Etnograficzne, (vol.54)*, 52-70. <https://doi.org/10.12775/lse.2015.54.05>
- Dunne, S., & Lewis, D. (1994). *The Foods We Read and the Words We Eat: Four approaches to The language of food in fiction and nonfiction*. Unpublished Dissertation: Middle Tennessee State University.
- George, K. (2023). Of Wine and Steak: Reading Gustatory Signs/Signifiers in Roland Barthes' Essays. *Saudi Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 8(8), 224–226.
- Guha, M. (2023,). *Significance Of Food As Cultural Identity Through Hindi Songs / Film Fugitives*. Film Fugitives. <https://fugitives.com/food-significance-in-bollywood-songs-explained-2023-bollywood-filmmaking/>
- J. Alex, G., & Justin, B. (2023). *Slamming the Door: Reinventing Kitchen Narratives in Contemporary Indian Movies*. Southeast Asian Review of English, 59(2), 7–19. <https://doi.org/10.22452/sare.vol59no2.3>
- Joshi, L. M. (2002). *Bollywood: Indian Popular Cinema*. Dakini.
- Khare, R. S. (1992). *The Eternal Food*. SUNY Press.
- Olivelle, P. (1995). Food in India. *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 23(3), 367–380. <https://doi.org/10.1007/bf01463136>
- Parasecoli, F. (2021). Food Studies and communication. *Communication*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/obo/9780199756841-0255>
- Parasecoli, F. (2011). *Savoring semiotics: Food in intercultural communication*. *Social Semiotics*, 21(5), 645-663. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2011.578803>
- Prime Video: *Daawat-e-Ishq*. (2014). <https://www.primevideo.com/detail/Daawat-e-Ishq/0G55379FDEUW8JGVOLPOL3UMZR>
- Spinelli, D. (2020). *THE CONNECTION BETWEEN FOOD AND CINEMA*. www.academia.edu. https://www.academia.edu/44358709/THE_CONNECTION_BETWEEN_FOOD_AND_CINEMA
- Stano, S. (n.d.). *Signata 15 / Nurturing Meaning: Food, Myth and Signification*. Signata Open Edition Journals.
- Vester, K. (2015). *A Taste of Power*. University of California Press.