

Changing Practices of Meat Consumption among Hindus in a North Indian Town

Mohit Chaturvedi, July 2019

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ABSTRACT

The food practices of Hindus in north India have historically been viewed through the prisms of caste and region—high-caste Hindus are vegetarians and while the lower castes eat meat vegetarianism remains desirable. In recent years these practices, especially a growing consumption of meat, have been explained by reference to increased economic prosperity and the emergence of a ‘modern’ middle class. Several recent surveys of food practices have unequivocally reported that the relationship between caste and meat consumption and avoidance is not as straightforward as generally believed and that some of the most prosperous parts of India have the highest proportions of vegetarian population.

Drawing on fieldwork conducted among a group of Hindus in a north Indian town this research suggests that while caste and economic wellbeing remain important determinants of food practices, these practices, especially the practices of meat consumption and avoidance, are far too complex and nuanced to be adequately explained by these two factors alone.

A detailed documentation of everyday food practices, in particular the avoidance and consumption of meat, suggests that while the everyday practice remains overwhelmingly vegetarian there is increased discretion in food choices and greater reflected consumption. Food has moved outside the household and into the public domain, the boundaries of ‘vegetarian’ and ‘non-vegetarian’ have been stretched, there is regular movement between the two categories, and today it is possible to consume meat while being a member of a vegetarian household. The changes in food practices—motivated by diverse considerations—are not in any one direction but in multiple directions including vegetarians taking to meat consumption and those who eat meat turning vegetarian.

Building on the explanations of caste and economic wellbeing this thesis suggests that the food practices of north Indian Hindus can be better understood against the backdrop of socio-economic changes that have swept India post-1990 as Hindus create and re-create their social identities in a rapidly changing world.

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INTRODUCTION

My Research Question

In this thesis, I examine the changes in practices of meat consumption amongst a group of Hindus in north India. Specifically, I ask what underlies these changes. While this question may seem innocuous, asking it involves destabilising long-held presumptions regarding meat consumption and changes to dietary preferences in India. My thesis aims to step outside the parameters that normally contain this topic and its anthropological investigation. I argue that the commonly held understandings of meat consumption and changes to it—namely caste and socio-economic explanations—while important do not adequately reveal how meat shapes, and is shaped by, a complex network of socio-economic and political forces. I argue that anthropological paradigmatic thinking has obscured, rather than revealed, what meat means to people. Therefore, instead of asking what meat means, and what it means in class and caste explanations of meat consumption and avoidance, I ask what meat means in the everyday circumstances in which it is consumed. This does not mean that I have ignored caste and class explanans – or that they cease to be relevant; however, it is important for anthropological explanations to consider the ways in which all-encompassing explanations can squeeze out significant explanatory bases that could, if accommodated, offer real insights into the everyday practices of consumption. These marginalised explanations have much to offer, and I rehearse them in this thesis to deepen and expand our understandings of consumption, even beyond that of meat itself; identity (re-)creation; and the myriad social forces that shape north Indian society today.

Whilst this thesis considers the changing patterns of meat consumption amongst Hindus of north India, this thesis is not intended to look at Hindus as a collective or to be a comprehensive study of the myriad caste identities and the interaction between these castes. Perhaps a more apt title for this thesis would have been ‘to examine changing patterns amongst people who happen to be Hindu, and happen to live in North India’. Given the symbolic meaning meat to Hindus, it is necessary that the respondents be Hindu, however this thesis is more interested in exploring how their practices of meat consumption might have changed in their interactions with ‘modernity’, as opposed to their food practices as a marker of identity vis a vis other caste groups. This thesis is not about the “Hindu Religion” and the way in which Hindus interact with each other, and

the role that meat plays in these interactions. Rather, this thesis is concerned with understanding the ordinary, everyday practices of people who happen to be Hindus and how their engagement with meat is changing against the backdrop of the larger socio-economic changes taking place in society. In her work *The Hindus* (2009), Wendy Doniger explains that archaeology uses the ‘available light’ of artefacts to draw conclusions about historical societies. To borrow this phrase, I hope that in looking at a group of Hindu people and examining their practices and changes to those practices, this thesis generates some ‘light’ that can help us understand some parts of a complex and dynamic society.

A key assumption in the anthropological (and popular) imagery of Hindu food practice is that it is essentially vegetarian. Much of the existing body of anthropological literature on Hindu food and related practices, *Homo Hierarchicus* by Louis Dumont (1966/1970) perhaps being the most well known example, is founded on the idea that Hindus avoid eating meat because meat is considered impure and its consumption is believed to pollute the consumer. This view is an outgrowth of understandings of the person’s situatedness in the caste hierarchy. Briefly put, the long-held paradigmatic view is that the higher a person is situated in the caste hierarchy—an important social and religious organising principle in Hinduism—the more entrenched are their vegetarian food practices.

For too long, meat avoidance and consumption among Hindus has been explained by caste-specific food practices. That is, high-caste Hindus, especially Brahmins, are vegetarian, while low-caste Hindus eat meat, despite vegetarianism being the preferred eating practice. In recent years, the increased economic wellbeing of many Indians has likely contributed to the increased meat consumption in India, including among north Indian Hindus. Whilst it is true that caste and class have defining influence on food practices in India, the link between food practices, caste and class is not necessarily linear. Zimmermann (1987) identified that vegetarianism, associated with Brahmins, was one of many competing models of food practices among Hindus. Even among north Indian Brahmins, vegetarianism is not a universal practice. Many hill Brahmins consume meat without fear of any social sanctions against them, whereas vegetarianism is more strictly observed among the Brahmins of the plains of Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh. While across the world, and historically, increased income levels are associated with increased consumption of animal products, in India income is mediated by culturally established food preferences and practices of meat consumption, so that some of the richest states in India have the lowest incidence of meat eating. While caste and income do determine

food practices, attributing unfailing predictive powers to them risks overlooking the complex interplay of factors, in the ever-evolving social milieu, to arrive at erroneous conclusions about why people consume or avoid meat.

My research builds on the existing body of literature, using it to contextualise my research without letting it guide the process of the research itself. My research begins by documenting practices of meat consumption and avoidance among a group of Hindus in north India through participant observation and conversations, and by accessing pertinent material published in the popular press. Every effort has been made to avoid being influenced by preconceived notions about who the participants are, how they behave or how they ought to behave. The data collected through the year-long fieldwork process - mostly with high caste Hindu men - is drawn from the everyday lives and socio-economic and cultural milieus of the participant households, to make sense of the observed and documented food practices but contrast them with the stated desired food practices. The food practices of these households are then used to encapsulate continuity and change in the social lives of the participants.

My research adds to the existing understanding of meat eating and avoidance among the Hindus of north India. It reveals that across both the self-ascribed categories of 'vegetarian' and 'non-vegetarian', the everyday practice of food consumption is vegetarian. This is not for economic reasons alone, but also for cultural and social reasons. Whereas meat plays a key role in identity formation and (re-)creation, in identifying as vegetarian or non-vegetarian, its presence and importance in everyday food practices is insignificant. Other interesting findings from this research include the close connection between meat and alcohol, and meat, alcohol and festivity. It shows that new celebratory events have been invented or adopted to accommodate meat and alcohol alongside more ritualistic celebrations in which alcohol and meat are avoided. My research also highlights the role of multiple stakeholders in influencing food practices, which reflects a shift away from family-determined food practices. It confirms certain known facts about meat consumption and avoidance, such as the masculine nature of meat consumption. However, one of the most important findings of this research is that the categories of 'vegetarian' and 'meat eater' are not two watertight, hermetically sealed compartments among north Indian Hindus. The definitions of these two categories are fluid and their boundaries are repeatedly stretched. There is constant movement between these two categories. Many vegetarians become meat eaters in certain spaces and social contexts, and many meat eaters become vegetarians at certain times and stages of their lives and as

part of creating and (re-)creating their social identities. This has perhaps always been the case, but recent socio-economic changes, such as the rise of urban living and nuclear families, the increased consumption of food in public spaces and with non-kin, the influence of non-family actors on food practices, and the ideas of individual choice, have all made the movement between the categories of vegetarian and non-vegetarian easier and more commonplace today than perhaps ever before.

Existing Explanatory Models

A recent study conducted by Natrajan and Jacob (2018) suggests that between 23 and 37 per cent of Indians are vegetarian, placing vegetarians as a minority in India. The study further reports variations in the proportion of vegetarians across a variety of criteria employed to disaggregate the population. Geographically, north India has the highest percentage of vegetarians, while the north-east has the lowest percentage, with only 2 per cent of the population living in this region being vegetarian. Vegetarianism is most prevalent among Brahmins, while the scheduled tribes have the lowest incidence of vegetarianism. A greater percentage of men, compared to women, consume meat.

Survey studies like that of Natrajan and Jacob (2018) play an important role in shedding light on the wide prevalence of meat eating in India. In doing so, they provide a basis that challenges the longstanding view that Indians are primarily vegetarian, a misconception born out of the hegemonic narrative of Brahminical Hinduism. However, the reported figures from this survey do not offer a substantive understanding of the dynamics of meat consumption. In fact, they do little more than indicate that there are more meat eaters in India than was hitherto believed. One could even argue that these figures serve as a confirmatory thesis; yes, more Brahmins eat meat than was earlier thought, but a much greater percentage of Brahmins as compared to any other caste group are vegetarian and so it *must* be true that a greater percentage of high-caste Hindus are vegetarian than are low-caste Hindus. Thus, vegetarianism must have to do with caste affiliation. Likewise, because the percentage of vegetarians is highest in north India—the ‘bible belt’ of Brahminical Hinduism—and lowest in the predominantly Christian and tribal north-east India, Hinduism must be associated with vegetarianism.

While the figures reported by Natrajan and Jacob (2018) are ‘accurate’,¹ the perils of accepting them on face value must be considered. Although figures are often helpfully indicative of a particular reality, they may fail to capture nuances and complexities because of an inherent bias towards aggregates. They also have the additional problem of being open to more than one interpretation. One foundational concern in this case is that Natrajan and Jacob’s survey relies upon traditional identities of caste, region and gender but does not unpack what it mean to be a meat eater or vegetarian, how frequently meat is consumed, and if demand for meat is increasing rapidly in percentage terms, what are the base figures it is increasing from. If the demand for meat has doubled in a certain region, has it increased from two kilograms per person per year to four? If this be the case, the increase may look more dramatic when expressed in percentage terms.

Another powerful explanans for food practices, namely class, has emerged in the wake of the last three decades of Indian economic growth and development, which have been marked by rapid social, economic and political changes. These changes have taken to a climax the processes initiated by the colonisation of India, and which were continued post-independence by the Indian state. Some of these changes have received more scholarly attention than have others, making for a topically uneven ethnographic record. The inauguration of economic liberalisation and market reforms in the early 1990s provided impetus to a growing body of literature on the Indian middle class. The logic of the market economy has much to do with this. Increasingly, societies are viewed in terms of their market potential, and the middle class—with their large disposable income—is central to this. Stemming from this focus on the middle class, ever more socio-cultural, economic and political phenomena are explained using the logic of this class (see, for example, Baviskar & Ray, 2011; Beteille, 2002; Brosius, 2010; Favero, 2005; Fernandes, 2006; Ganguly-Scrase & Scrase, 2009; Jaffrelot & van der Veer, 2008; Joshi, 2001; Sridharan, 2004; Varma, 1998). Unsurprisingly then, the increased consumption of meat in India has also been attributed to the rise of the middle class. In this explanation, the link between meat and middle class is straightforward; the expanding middle class in India means that more people than ever have some disposable income to spend on discretionary purchases, such as meat (see Economic Research Service [USDA], 2003;

¹ I note that Economic and Political Weekly (EPW) is a reputable peer-reviewed journal. While the data set was not available for examination, the NSSO data, on which these findings are based, is considered robust and reliable. Moreover, the findings presented in the reference paper are not significantly different from the findings of other earlier surveys, referenced in this thesis, on meat-eating practices in India.

Gandhi & Zhou, 2010; Nandy, 2004). In other words, what stood between many Indians and meat in the past was lack of money. Now that this constraint has been removed, at least to some extent, more people in India are consuming more meat. However, this explanation does not elucidate the appeal of meat as an item of food, nor address why those who normally eat meat refrain from eating it at certain times or on certain occasions while other occasions are considered incomplete without meat. These phenomena require explanations over and above those underpinned by caste and wealth.

Changes in the social, economic and political spheres have touched all aspects of life in India. This can be seen, for example, in changes in the occupational structure of the country, marked by a steady decline in the importance of agriculture for employment generation.² Further examples include rapid urbanisation; the decline of joint families³ and the increased incidence of inter-caste marriages (exogamy)⁴; the increased participation of women in the workforce; an increased reliance on the market for various goods and services, ranging from everyday needs such as food products to cosmetics and childcare; and reliance on the market for leisure and entertainment.

Although change has not been wholesale, it is palpably present. As eating is necessarily involved in, and attendant to, these changes, studying food consumption is a particularly effective way to shed light on what these macro-level changes have enabled people to do with their lives and how substantial changes have been incorporated into the mundane and everyday routines of living. In this thesis, I focus on food practices, especially one kind of consumption—meat consumption—to better understand the complex network of change and continuity in India. By looking at everyday practice around the consumption or avoidance of something as symbolic in the Hindu context as meat—who eats meat and who does not, with whom, when, what kind of meat, with what, who buys and who cooks it, when is it avoided and by whom—we can better understand the continuity and change in the practices themselves, as well as the creation and re-creation of the social and cultural identity of a people.

² Though not as rapidly as the share of agriculture in the gross domestic product (GDP) of the country.

³ Noting that the historically dominant family structure in India continues to be debated by sociologists. Nevertheless, regardless of its historic dominance there is a general acceptance that joint families are on the decline (see for example Niranjana et al. 2005).

⁴ Even though, as noted later in this thesis, endogamy continues to be the overwhelmingly dominant practice.

As I pose these questions, I avoid the temptation of treating meat as a static symbol—of wealth or of caste position, for instance—in favour of an analysis that attends to how meat shapes, and is shaped by, a complex network of socio-economic and political forces. The data upon which I depend were sourced from the everyday contexts in which meat is and is not present, as avoidance is a crucial part of what meat means to people. Unlike the data collected for a large survey using standardised, structured questionnaires, the fine-grained ethnographic data that I collected in the course of my fieldwork permits rich details to emerge, enabling a nuanced analysis of what meat means in everyday contexts.

Fieldwork and Conclusions

For one year, between 2014 and 2015, I conducted ethnographic research on the practices of meat consumption and avoidance in a Hindu upper-caste and middle-class neighbourhood of a north Indian town. The rich data on everyday being with (and without) meat that I obtained from 11 participant households⁵ through participant observation, life stories and unstructured interviews led me to conclude that:

- Everyday practices are central to the creation and re-creation of social identities. Multiple food practices have always existed in India, but social and economic constraints due to stringently prescribed sociality, limited purchasing power and restricted access to markets meant that Hindu food choices and the resultant expression of identities came across to, and were viewed by, anthropologists, among others, as primarily a function of caste and/or regional affiliation.
- Caste and recent improvements in economic wellbeing are important factors in understanding the practices of meat consumption. However, they are frequently overemphasised. In centring our analysis on everyday practices and locating these within the context of the larger socio-economic changes taking place in India, we can develop a much richer and deeper understanding of contemporary north Indian Hindu identities.
- These identities are deeply contextual, overlapping and at times contradictory. While meat eating has increased, everyday practices remain centred on the

⁵ These households are described more fully in Chapter 2; however, in summary, they were all upper-caste Hindu households, although one household followed Jainism. They were also educated middle-class households from north India. While originally from rural areas, these households had lived in urban areas for two generations or more. In terms of access, it was far easier for me to engage predominantly with men and so you will find that the dominant voices in this thesis are of upper-caste Hindu men.

vegetarian. New locations and events to practice meat eating have been added, but older vegetarian practices have rarely altogether disappeared. Moreover, increased acceptance of certain kinds of meat products corresponds with violent opposition to other meat products.

- In using the tools of practice theory, my observations on contemporary consumption or avoidance of meat point to a complex engagement between the ‘new’ and the ‘old’ as Hindus in north India make sense of their rapidly changing worlds. ‘Vegetarian’ and ‘meat eater’ are not diametrically opposed categories among north Indian Hindus. There is constant movement between these two categories as people create and re-create their social identities.

The growing body of literature in the area of the anthropology of food, as discussed in later in this thesis, and the varied aspects of food it ranges across, is testimony to a growing interest in better understanding aspects of food production and consumption. This interest extends from research laboratories, to genetically modified crops and animals, to ownership of the means of agricultural production, to the varied and changing food preferences of consumers and the role of different stakeholders in shaping or influencing these preferences. However, the food practices of Hindus, and particularly their meat consumption, are primarily viewed through one of two seemingly mutually exclusive lenses: caste affiliation⁶ and increased prosperity and the concomitant ability to eat ‘better food’. While telling us something about the practices of meat consumption, these lenses can be rigid and deterministic and may fail to capture the nuances and complexities of meat consumption among Hindus in north India, as I have suggested above. They also bypass the actual experience of eating, an experience in which I am ethnographically interested and in which, with my informants, I was primarily engaged as an observer and participant throughout the term of my fieldwork. This is significant, because it is as consumers that people actually encounter food, even if they are also producers or purveyors. Everyone has to eat, after all. Despite this, the act of consuming food is all but obscured in favour of the pre- and post-swallowing lenses of caste affiliation and ‘better food’, respectively. The caste affiliation, or pre-swallowing lens, renders the food itself meaningful in caste terms before it comes in contact with anyone’s

⁶ For the sake of simplicity, caste has become a synonym for ‘varna’, which is the fourfold hierarchical classification of Hindu society whereby the terms Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra are used to denote an individual’s place in this hierarchy. However, what is commonly understood as caste in India is actually ‘Jati’, a geographically defined endogamous group. Thus, when one moves away from one’s place of origin, one moves away from one’s Jati and associated support networks.

mouth. The ‘better food’, or post-swallowing lens, focuses on the effects of consuming or not consuming particular foods, both nutritionally and in terms of conspicuous consumption. In this thesis, I am more interested in what I might call the swallowing world itself—the world in which meat and all of its networks are consumed, avoided, understood, known and made. This is the everyday world in which food circulates. This is certainly not to say that the pre- and post-swallowing concerns, as I have put them above, do not matter or do not occur to consumers; it is only to say that, in isolation, they may obscure the very context in which their principles are enlivened and consumed.

As I will demonstrate in this thesis, much has been written across a diverse range of disciplines—including anthropology, medicine, political science, history and sociology, as well as in agriculture, trade and other industry journals and the popular press—about the social, economic and political changes that influence food practices. There is also an abundance of research on the green revolution⁷ and the food procurement programs of the Indian state to better address long- and short-term food shortages, as well as the planning and execution issues that have dogged these programs. Numerous interventions have had consequences for the staple food of communities in many areas of India. Often wheat and rice have become the dominant crops at the expense of commonly grown millets. Surplus grain and resulting low-cost poultry feed played an important role in spurring the growth of the poultry industry in India.

Moving away from the green revolution and onto rapid urbanisation, the conditions of urban living, which favoured nuclear families and altered the nature of sociality from kin-based to more secular social networks, relaxed the norms of endogamy and commensality, and moved food increasingly into the public domain. There is also an increasingly large literature on urbanisation in India and its consequences, including for family structure and kinship groups (see for example Singh, 2003).

Academics and researchers have written extensively about mass media—especially the televised versions of the Hindu epics Ramayana and Mahabharata—and its role in the rise of the Hindu right-wing Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) and its affiliated organisations. These organisations have attempted to proclaim and defend, with violence if necessary, the boundaries of ‘acceptable food practices’, to build, among other things, a more homogeneous ‘Hindu identity’. Especially since the formation of a BJP-led government

⁷ For example see: Dasgupta (1977), Dhanagare(1987), Bajpai (2016), and Nelson et al. (2019).

in India in 2014, these attempts have found expression directly in the continuous tightening of legislation by the state to outlaw cow slaughter, and indirectly in the emboldening of the vigilante groups that have sprung up to prevent the sale of cattle for beef. When it comes to meat, the logic of economics and consumption patterns merges with the dynamics, and dynamism, of culture. An increase in meat consumption has relevance not only in terms of an absolute increase but also in terms of the cultural significance of this change. The question emerges as to what might explain the contradiction of a growing appetite for meat on the one hand, and an increasingly hardened stance on beef consumption by certain sections of the Hindu population on the other.

In his influential work on sugar, Sidney Mintz (1986) found it useful to look at changes in the larger society and resulting changes in the household to understand how cane sugar, a little known or used commodity in Britain until the settlement of Barbados in 1627, entrenched itself in British households. Mintz writes, ‘I became interested in how those Europeans and North Americans became consumers’ (p. xv). In this way, as with many consumption practices, the changing practices of meat consumption among Hindus of north India are best understood in the context of the social and economic changes unleashed by the colonial political and economic arrangements. These changes gained pace and complexity in post-independence India, accelerating dramatically in the late 1980s and early 1990s with the liberalisation of the Indian economy. The resulting social and economic changes have had a bearing on various aspects of Hindu culture and everyday life in north India, including food practices, and created new avenues for the expression of social identity.

This thesis adds to the existing literature by building upon the structures of caste and increased wealth to explain the avoidance or eating of meat. By focusing on everyday household practices, and the richness that this analysis brings, we can see that meat consumption is a tool through which Hindus create, re-create, change and adapt their complex social identities.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 1 embeds my thesis within the existing literature and explanatory models. It also provides an overview of the fluid and deeply contextual nature of the meaning of the term ‘vegetarian’—a word that is often considered solely about the eating of meat, but which

in a Hindu context is far more nuanced in that it is informed by religious practices and the ideas of what constitutes a household practice.

Chapter 2 describes my field site (Sushant Lok) in the city of Dehradun in the state of Uttarakhand. It also outlines my methodology and provides a brief description of my key informants and households observed. My observations are informed by my lived experience as a north Indian Hindu of the Brahmin caste, and in the context of this research, my fieldwork is as an observer of—and authentic participant in—everyday practices. By authentic, I mean that because of my background, the people I observed were relaxed and open during my observations and I was deeply embedded within their activities and daily lives.

To understand the place of meat in food practices, we must first have a common understanding of everyday food practices. Such an understanding may well be intuitive when writing about one's own society. Drawing on my observations of both participant households and my lived experience, **Chapter 3** looks at the everyday food practices in Sushant Lok to understand what people consume every day, how and why.

In **Chapter 4**, I explore the practices of meat consumption and where they have changed. I divide the consumption of meat into two broad categories—consumption of meat at home and consumption of meat outside. While these two areas of consumption differ, the thematic areas covered often overlap: meat and hospitality, meat and masculinity, meat and celebration, the association between meat and alcohol, changing meat preferences, and change and continuity in general. Where possible, I also look into the likely reasons behind continuity and change. In examining the practices of meat consumption, I conceptualise consumption as a set of stages, starting from the purchase of the meat, to its storage, processing, cooking and consumption.

Chapter 5 explores the renunciation and adoption of meat among Hindus, where such renunciation and adoption is ostensibly operating *within* the Hindu religious paradigm. In exploring the ways in which meat is used as a marker of identity, whether as a subversive act of reclaiming a so called 'immutable identity' as caste, or to signify changing identities to mark occasions or periods in one's life, as in the case of mourning, age and so on, we can see that food—and particularly meat with its high symbolic importance for Hindus—is one of many tools that the Hindus of north India use to create and re-create their changing social identities.

Chapter 6 outlines my conclusions and offers some suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 1: EMBEDDING AND CONTEXTUALISING MY RESEARCH QUESTION

1.1 Hindu food as Vegetarian Food

Although there are regional and caste variations in cuisine and food practices, it is a common perception that vegetarianism is one of the shared and defining characteristics of Hindu food practice. While it is true that many Hindu communities are vegetarian, the majority of Indians—and as a corollary, since Hindus are approximately 85 per cent of the Indian population, the majority of Hindus—consume meat of some kind.

In his book *Indian Food: A Historical Companion*, K.T. Achaya cites Indian government census⁸ reports to put the proportions of vegetarians (probably lacto-vegetarians) at the following levels:



Figure 1. Map of India

States with a high proportion of vegetarians (shown as a percentage of total population) are Gujarat 69, Rajasthan 60, Punjab-Haryana 54 and Uttar Pradesh 50. At medium levels stand Madhya Pradesh 45, Karnataka 34, Maharashtra 30 and Bihar 24. States with a low rate of vegetarians include Tamil

⁸ The word ‘census’ has perhaps been used, incorrectly, in place of the NSSO’s National Sample Survey, which periodically collects household expenditure data.

Nadu 21, Andhra Pradesh 16, Assam 15, and Kerala, West Bengal and Orissa 6 each (Achaya, 1994, p. 57).

As can be seen from the map in Figure 1, the states with the highest proportion of vegetarian population are those located in the north of India and the state of Gujarat in western India.

More recently, the Food and Agriculture Organization cited the Indian National Sample Survey Organisation's (NSSO) household survey data to put the vegetarian population of India at 42 per cent (Delgado et al., 2003). A 2006 survey conducted by the news outlets The Hindu, CNN and IBN similarly put the vegetarian population of the country at 40 per cent. According to the survey:

Only 31 per cent of Indians are vegetarians. The figure is 21 per cent for families (with all vegetarian members). Another nine per cent of the population is 'eggetarian', or vegetarians who eat eggs. Vegetarianism has a predictable pattern: women are more likely to be vegetarian than men and so are those above the age of 55 ... The findings show that vegetarianism is a function of inherited cultural practice rather than individual belief. Religion and community matter: as many as 55 per cent of Brahmins are vegetarians. The corresponding figure for Adivasis⁹ is 12 per cent. (Yadav & Kumar, 2006)

This indicates that the majority of India's Hindu population consumes meat in some form. This raises questions about how vegetarianism came to be associated with Hindu food practices in popular perception.

1.1.1 The dominance of the 'Brahminical model'

The definition of what comprises the 'Indian culture', or the 'Hindu culture' more specifically, has been for a long time the monopoly of upper-caste Hindus, especially Brahmins, the priestly class. In the 'Brahminical model' (see Zimmermann, 1987), vegetarianism, itself a product of the challenge to Hinduism from Buddhism in the sixth century BC (Doniger, 2009), was the desirable and dominant food practice. When Europeans started studying Indian culture and Hinduism, both to understand an ancient religion and to better govern a vast and poorly understood country, they relied on the Hindu elites, who, being upper caste, privileged vegetarianism¹⁰. In the resulting

⁹ Indigenous Indians; also called 'scheduled tribes' because they are listed in a schedule of the Indian Constitution.

¹⁰ For more on the engagement of Brahmins with colonial administration see Fuller, C. J. and Narasimhan, H. (2008) From landlords to software engineers: migration and urbanization among Tamil Brahmins. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 50 (1) 170-196.

European understanding of Hinduism, which later formed the basis of popular understandings of Hinduism in India, vegetarianism was one of the defining characteristics of Hinduism and Hindu food practices.

However, the Brahminical model of food practices did not go uncontested, even in areas where Brahminical Hinduism was dominant. In *The Jungle and the Aroma of Meat*, Francis Zimmermann (1987) observes:

Regarded as a superior form of feeding, vegetarianism progressively imposed itself on all the strata of Hindu society. Interestingly, however, the vegetarianism preached on the level of the Brahminic norms did not exclude the widespread consumption of meat in daily life. Contemporary social anthropology has brought to light a fundamental fact of ethnographic experience in India: the Ksatriya, the prince and warrior, in contrast to the Brahmin, traditionally remained an eater of meat. The meat diet was a feature of royalty and served not only as an observable fact of life but also as a representative model of life. (p. 182)

While it may be that a majority of Brahmins are vegetarian (Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, 2006), the conclusion that Hindu food practice is predominantly vegetarian is an oversimplification of the complexity of food practices across regions and groups. It says more about the social structure of Hindu society than the actual food practices of Hindus.

1.2 Changing Practices, Changing Country—An Alternative to Food Binaries

In recent years, meat consumption in India has again attracted attention. This renewed interest is driven by the perception that the consumption of meat is on the rise. In an age in which agriculture is a high-stake engagement involving large corporations, interest groups and states, increased demand for high-value food items such as meat is understandably of interest for its money-spinning potential. Articles, not only in the popular press but also in academic journals, business and trade reports and magazines, have focused on the growing demand for animal products, especially meat, to weave a narrative of a shift in food practices in India (see for example Economic Research Service [USDA], 2003; Nandy, 2004; Gandhi & Zhou, 2010; Sreeraman, 2011; NY Daily News, 2013). In this story, as disposable income increases, an increase in meat consumption signals upward economic mobility. These changes are not without a historical precedent. As income levels rise in a society, animal products, high in protein, become more

important and carbohydrate-rich starchy foods derived from plants become less important (Nandy, 2004).

In the case of India, the increase in the consumption of meat has been explained by the emergence of a large middle class, especially in the years following economic liberalisation in 1991. Middle-class income levels have increased resulting in greater disposable income, which, in turn, has fuelled the consumer boom evident in everything from car sales to shopping malls and restaurants to luxury brands. Of this there is little doubt. However, the extent and depth of the increased prosperity and accompanying changes in tastes and preferences are debated and contested.

Social and economic changes have brought new identities to Indians, whether class-based, professional, or as members of associations or political parties. Yet the acquisition of new identities does not mean that old identities cease to exist, and the degree to which new identities have taken hold is highly variable. Various modern and secular identities exist alongside one another, while traditional identities of caste, gender and regional affiliation simultaneously continue to thrive and determine behaviour in certain social contexts. Multiple versions of India exist and impinge on an individual simultaneously. Steve Derne (2008), commenting on the cultural changes said to have swept across India since economic liberalisation and subsequent globalisation, notes:

While the lives of élite Indians were transformed by the new opportunities associated with economic liberalization, the lives of non-élite Indians were characterized more by continuities than by changes. This suggested that the effects of purely cultural globalization were relatively minor as long as economic and family structures were not simultaneously transformed. (p. 11)

Further, while the standard of living of many Indians has improved in the last two decades, as explained further in the literature review below, examining cultural changes through the lens of the middle class is fraught with problems. Even though ‘middle class’ is the largest self-ascribed social category in India, researchers have struggled to define the Indian middle class. The Indian middle class is so diverse across various parameters that it is difficult to conceptualise it as a coherent category for social analysis (Beteille 2001)

Despite the challenges to making sense of the Indian middle class, the category remains relevant to many researchers. Mazzarella (2005) argues:

For no matter how frustrated we may become in our attempts sociologically to map the ‘reality’ of the Indian middle classes, the fact remains that the category itself has become an important marker of identification, aspiration and critique in contemporary Indian public culture. The Indian middle class may be a questionable empirical entity. But the ‘Indian Middle Class,’ taken as both a performative and a discursive space (cf Liechty 2003), is most decidedly a reality to be reckoned with. (p. 3)

The concept of ‘performative’ and ‘discursive’ space usefully shifts the focus from simplistic economic definitions of middle class to practices and performances of individuals who consider themselves middle class. Moreover, this approach helps us to move beyond quantitative data, which can provide insights into the material *capacity* of individuals and households but has limitations in its ability to capture the myriad ways in which identity can be expressed. While this concept of ‘performing identity’ can help us better understand food practices and changes to them, our understanding can be further enhanced by locating these performances against the backdrop of the larger social and economic changes that have taken place in India in the last 300 years, and of which the Indian middle class—howsoever it is defined—is one outcome.

1.3 Impact of Broader Social Changes on ‘Everyday’ Practices

The food practices among Hindus in north India have been influenced by changes in the socio-economic context of north Indian society. These changes are varied and numerous, and interlink with and influence one another. For ease of presentation, I have divided these changes into two broad categories: changes at the level of the household and community, and changes at the level of the macro-economy and larger society. The key changes I refer to are listed below¹¹. These changes are discussed in further detail later in the thesis.

At the household and community level:

1. a dilution of the practice of endogamy and of restrictions on commensality
2. an end to the household monopoly over preparing and serving food
3. the movement of food into the public space and markets as a transactional commodity

¹¹ It is not my contention that factors affecting the household and larger society are mutually exclusive and independent of one another. They have been listed here as two distinct categories for ease of presentation and clarity.

4. the rise of the nuclear family
5. greater engagement of women in paid work
6. a shift in the unique circumstances of urban living.

At the level of the economy and society:

1. the green revolution
2. globalisation, economic liberalisation and the emergence of a new consumer culture and associated new ideas of individuality and modernity
3. a divergence between the production of food and its consumption
4. the increased power and outreach of corporations involved in agribusiness
5. the increased reliance of consumers on processed food
6. the mediation of food practices by ‘experts’
7. the ascendancy of the developmental state.

Together, these macro- and meso-level changes, along with other changes not listed here, provide the context in which food practices, including those of meat consumption, have been shaped and are carried out. My research looks at everyday food practices, focusing on the practices of meat consumption among the Hindus of north India, to understand how these changes affect both everyday lives at the micro level and the ways in which social identity is created and re-created. In focusing on everyday practices, this thesis seeks to move beyond the prevalent explanatory binaries of caste and socio-economic status. It is shown that while caste and socio-economic status impact meat consumption, they cannot tell the complete story.

1.3.1 Reduced influence of kin groups

The consumption of food was until relatively recently highly ritualised in north Indian Hindu society, especially among caste Hindus. The procuring, processing, cooking and serving of food was governed by strict and inviolable ‘rules’.¹² This resulted in members of a sub-caste eating food ritually cooked only by members of their sub-caste and eating only with members of their sub-caste. People only ate at their homes or the homes of relatives. Eating and drinking in public places was rare. These ritually sanctioned food practices created clear boundaries of social identity (Liechty, 2005).

¹² Noting that Hinduism is often described as ‘orthopraxy’ as opposed to ‘orthodoxy’, as its group identity focuses on practice rather than belief in a doctrine (see Doniger, 2014).

Caste, regional and family traditions help to maintain and reproduce community and household food practices. North Indian Hindu society is divided into endogamous regional sub-castes called *jatis*. Endogamy facilitates the perpetuation of food practices by favouring marriages between people of the same sub-caste, leading to a convergence of caste and region, historically two of the main determinants of food practices in north India. Endogamous marriages are thus of fundamental importance in the continuation of food practices in north Indian Hindu households.¹³

Closely related to endogamy, and similarly central to maintaining food practices, were strict caste-based food norms and restrictions on commensality. Commenting on food and marriage among the Hindus of Nepal, Liechty (2005) recognises the centrality of these factors in reinforcing social boundaries:

Human preoccupation with food, sex and sociality are often culturally interlinked and this is undoubtedly tied to the fact that sexual and culinary exchanges both involve passing or crossing frontiers, thresholds, or orifices of the individual as well as the social body. (p. 5)

Urbanisation has resulted in a relaxation of eating practices and lowering of barriers to commensality. This has been a result of not only expediency (Conlon, 1995) but also sociality (Caplan, 2008). Today, cooked food is widely available in the market as a commodity to be transacted. This is one of the most significant changes in the food practices of north Indian Hindus and central to the changes in the practices of meat consumption. Economic liberalisation and globalisation have made available to people an ever-increasing array of new food products. These are consumed not only for the status they afford and their novelty value, but also because the traditional definitions of purity and pollution are not applicable to these hitherto unknown products (Donner, 2008).

The changes in practices related to food have affected societies and communities in different periods. Jewish people, known for their strict food practices, are a case in point. Buckser (1999), in his study of the food habits of the Jewish community in Denmark, finds that the observance of dietary rules among the Jewish population has declined remarkably since the end of the Second World War. He attributes this decline to the gradual integration of the Jewish population into the larger Danish society, a high rate of

¹³ In the group I studied, all marriages except one were endogamous. This suggests not only the continuing popularity of endogamy and its importance in social relations, but also helps to understand the continuation of food practices.

intermarriage and the disappearance of Jewish enclaves, such that ‘engagement with the larger culture has made the precise nature and contours of Jewish community difficult to define’ (p. 193). Similarly, the reduced influence of kin groups can be seen to affect food practices among Hindus in north India. In such an environment, family as the primary site of social reproduction is less rooted in traditional support networks than it was in the past. Families are moving away from their villages of origin and small towns to larger urban centres. This dislocation has not only been geographical, but also social. Urbanisation has put pressure on traditional institutions such as caste and kinship groups and joint family by creating conditions favourable to nuclear families (Cohen, 1981; Singh, 2003).

This dislocation has ‘ripple effects’. For example, while women are considered the guardians and repository of cultural practices in Indian households (Donner, 2008), as is perhaps true of other cultures as well, in the Indian context historically women who joined their husbands’ households after marriage were not initiated into the customs of the marital home. Rather, strict endogamy ensured that they were *already* socialised into these customs, including the customs and practices of food consumption. While endogamy is still the norm in many families in India, exogamy is not uncommon, although it has been stagnant at under six per cent for the last four decades since the 1970s (Ray et al., 2017). Dislocation from caste and kinship groups, and increased contact with other groups in secular contexts, are important influences in bringing about this change.

Irrespective of whether groups are exogamous or endogamous, women have been central to the socialisation of children in cultural practices (Basu et al., 2017; Mariko, 1989). For example, in Indian households, women still learn cooking skills from a young age by helping their mothers in the kitchen. While the recent emphasis on the education of girls and on having a career, especially in middle-class urban households, has meant that girls have less time to spend in the kitchen, mothers still make efforts to teach them the ‘art’ of running the household. Mastering this ability is considered vital to a successful marriage and a ‘happy home’, as indicated by the frequent reference to ‘homely’ as a desirable quality for a wife in newspaper classifieds seeking an arranged marriage. The socialisation of a girl has as its focus developing skills to support not her family of birth but rather preparing the girl to live with the family that she will marry into.

With the recent social and economic developments, more women than ever are stepping out of the household to engage in paid employment. This has increased dependence on

domestic help to run households and take care of children. In fact, reliance on domestic help has become indispensable to the socio-economic arrangements of the Indian middle class (Dickey, 2000; Qayum & Ray, 2011). Traditional Hindu food practices, dependent on the notion of purity and pollution, sit uncomfortably with an arrangement whereby an outsider—usually from a different caste, cultural, and economic background—is engaged to take care of the home and kitchen. Likewise, the increased engagement of women in the public sphere has increased reliance on the new options of eating out and takeaways (Caplan, 2008), further challenging the notion of purity in the preparation and consumption of food as traditionally understood among caste Hindus.

Finally, many families in urban India are nuclear families¹⁴ (Chadda and Deb, 2013), whereas even a generation ago they may have been joint or extended families in which the elders of the household were an important socialising influence on the children of the family. The socialisation of younger members of the family was conducted by the older generation, rather than their parents, ensuring the perpetuation of traditional social practices (Connerton, 1989). In contrast, in nuclear families, the individual food choices of household members can alter established food practices, especially with the increase in reflexive consumption and the willingness and opportunities to express new identities through individual choice.

Socialisation is a contested arena today. No longer is it a monopoly of the household. The state and its agencies through their policies and outreach (Allison, 1991), media through dispensation of images and messages (Kniazeva & Venkatesh, 2007) and corporate organisations through their financial muscle and product profile (Ritzer, 1993) are also serious players in the business of socialisation. In the new economy, family and kinship groups have become increasingly less important as units of economic and social activity. In contrast, non-kinship ties have become progressively more important as economic and social changes have gone hand in hand.

1.3.2 Cooked food—From the household to the market

The social changes—in terms of ‘who’ is within the household—reduce the monopoly of household and kinship groups as the *agents* of socialisation, while new economic arrangements mean that the market itself enters the household in the form of new

¹⁴ National Family Health Survey Data put the rate at 63% in 2005, up from 59% in 1998.

products. Or indeed, in the case of cooked food, household members can now eat in public spaces outside the home.

Among the many changes in food practices, one of the most significant is the loss of the monopoly of the household kitchen over the preparation and serving of food. While home-cooked food is still preferred over market-bought cooked food, especially in the case of everyday food, there is a growing acceptance of, and reliance on, market-prepared food¹⁵.

The monopoly of the household kitchen over the food consumed by its members meant that food practices could be controlled. This changed once cooked food became an economic product transacted in the market, itself a result of the increased mobility and spatial displacement of people in the ‘new economy’.¹⁶ The social world, which centred on interactions within the household and kin group, was replaced by wider social interactions and new forms of sociality—friendships with non-kinsmen, tea houses, movie halls and restaurants, to name a few—often leading to what Caplan (2008) calls crossing the ‘veg–non-veg divide’.

New economic arrangements, set in motion by colonialism, along with urbanisation, the movement of people, anonymity, and an expansion of markets and marketable goods and services, gradually moved cooked food into the public space and into the market as an exchangeable commodity. However, one of the essential pre-conditions for this to happen was the dilution of the restrictions on commensality. This happened gradually over time. Conlon (1995) describes how caste groups established exclusive eating houses in early colonial urban centres to observe their dietary norms. From this early practice of eating out from necessity grew the more cosmopolitan practice of eating out for leisure. One can still find regional eateries and lodges such as Marwari (trading community, originally from Rajasthan) *basas* (boarding houses) in urban areas. However, today, while these eateries and lodges still focus on the ethnic cuisines of the communities that founded

¹⁵ Increasingly cooked food from market is finding its way into households through home delivery by food outlets. This practice, which started with increased ownership of telephones and motorbikes, has been taken to an altogether different level – increased geographical range of delivery and extensive coverage of products and items – by companies like Zomato since the start of ‘smartphone revolution’. This is an excellent example of how technological changes are creating new opportunities for businesses by changing and shaping social practices.

¹⁶ New economy here refers to the colonial economy centred on cities and subsequent changes.

them, they do not have unmediated control over who is cooking the food or who is eating it, serving it, or cleaning the tables.

While the new economic arrangements may have encouraged occasional or regular eating of food outside, the home retains its privileged place as the favoured location for everyday food. Home food is thought of as ‘fresh’, ‘simple’, ‘healthy’, ‘wholesome’, ‘cooked using the best possible ingredients’, and ‘cooked lovingly’. It is commonly believed that home-cooked food ‘nourishes the body and the soul’. Outside food, on the other hand, is ‘cooked for profit’. It is the antithesis of home-cooked food: ‘it pleases only the tongue’.

The notion of respectability also figures prominently in the everyday discourse of the middle class, and food is one of the sites where this respectability is constructed. According to this middle-class narrative of respectability, only certain kinds of people eat outside¹⁷: the lower class (working class), either because they do not have the resources to cook at home or are given to the ‘base’ gratification of taste; or the debauched upper class, who do not believe in respectability, frugality or discipline. One eats by the roadside and the other eats in plush hotels and restaurants; however, the negative effects on the body and soul are the same.

This does not mean that public eating is not growing in India. It is flourishing, as evident to anyone observing a bazaar, a shopping mall or even a street corner. All kinds of food businesses exist. In many cases, eating out is borne of necessity; in other cases, it has become a cultural pursuit. Floating populations of young students and workers flocking to urban areas rely on public eating-places. Young people also use public eating-places as spaces to socialise and to ‘practice’ being urban, young and modern.

Interestingly, while various kinds of foods are available in public spaces, it is rare to find food businesses serving simple local cuisine approximating ‘everyday food’.

¹⁷ This may have changed in recent years and not nearly as strictly adhered to as in the past. Historically, and given the importance of bazaars as vibrant sites of commerce and culture as evident from the exalted position of Chandani Chowk the main market of Shajahanabad (Old Delhi) it is very likely that the depiction of the bazaar as the site of corruption, vice and risk was a colonial construct later adopted by middle class Indians. For more on the colonial interactions with the bazaar see Leong-Salobir, C. Y. (2011). *Food Culture in Colonial Asia: A Taste of Empire*. Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Commenting on the lack of marketability of the everyday Bengali food, Bose (2005) observes:

What I have mentioned as a drawback of Bengali food is what is really also its virtue; if you cannot commercialize it, you cannot vulgarize it either ... It is the product of the home and family ties, of personal relationships—as much of science as of human affection, as much of age-old wisdom as of an intuitive response to nature. (cited in Donner, 2011, p. 47)

While Bose refers to Bengali food, the same could be said of almost all local and regional cuisines in India. Partly it is because the logic of business does not support the product—after all people often eat out to try something different or for a change. But perhaps equally it is because everyday food—a meal—can only be cooked and eaten at home. The distinction between food and a meal can be seen as marking the boundary between home and outside.

As new economic arrangements have enabled market items to enter the household in the form of new products, or made it easier for people to engage in new eating experiences outside the home, it is informative to consider which food items have successfully gained a foothold in the market. Most successful food businesses have not tried to compete with meals even if their products are labelled as such. They have positioned their products as celebratory, as fun and frolic, as a marker of friendship, perhaps even as healthy—but rarely as *a meal*. One can have a pizza when one goes out with friends or a burger during a movie interval or even a *dosa*,¹⁸ one of the most popular south Indian food items consumed outside the house, but none of these would be considered a meal by most people. This may have to do with the structure of a meal (Douglas, 1972)—a meal must anticipate other meals and so be embedded in broader consumption patterns—but perhaps it also has to do with the social context in which a meal is consumed. The household remains central to a meal as the site of preparation and consumption. Also central to a meal is the involvement of the woman/women of the household. In most north Indian Hindu households, food continues to be cooked under the close supervision of the women of the household.

Clearly, new economic arrangements and broader changes taking place within society have impacted the available food options, including whether to eat inside or outside the home. As my research explores in subsequent chapters, these changes have so far only

¹⁸ A south Indian pancake made from lentil and rice.

touched the periphery of food practices, yet are proving powerful in shaping modern identities.

1.3.3 Processed food and changing practices of food consumption

An examination of the everyday food practices in north India reveals close links between food practices and the agricultural calendar. Food practices are seasonal in nature. The seasonality of everyday food practices points to the close connection between the production and consumption of food. While the close relationship between these two processes may have been disrupted by a decline in the importance of agriculture in employment and gross domestic product, the continuing everyday food practices were forged at a time when the population was largely rural and agricultural. This past reappears in the present in the privileging of the countryside, particularly the ancestral village, as the production site of authentic food, and the home as the preferred site of consumption. Both the ancestral village and the home share the desired attribute of control over the production of food, the only way to ensure its purity and authenticity. Thus, we find that in Indian popular and cinematic culture the village is also a trope for authentic food, while the city is the site of contamination (Baviskar & Ray, 2011; Nandy, 2001).

The increased reliance on processed food symbolises the divergence between production and consumption, but processed food is not the only sign of this divergence. Changes such as the increased availability of off-season fruits and vegetables also suggest the divergence between production and consumption and the commercialisation of agriculture. Macro-level changes, for example improvements in roads or cold chains including warehouses and trucks, have opened the market for distantly produced agricultural products. While established everyday food practices have privileged the consumption of seasonal fruits and vegetables underpinning such usage with the approval of *Ayurveda*, off-season fruits and vegetables are markers of affluence for those who consume them, as they command a premium in the market. This growing acceptance and availability of off-season and processed and packaged food also indicates the declining importance of the household as the site of food preparation, in turn bringing new opportunities to express identities.

While processed food has taken long strides in the last 30 years, its journey from inception to its current position has been chequered and incremental. Whereas it started by establishing itself in Indian homes in the form of humble semi-processed food items such

as wheat flour,¹⁹ ground and packaged spices, and packaged lentils and pulses in the 1980s, poly packs and tetra packs of branded snacks, confectionary and bakery items, and semi-prepared popular regional snacks, drinks, dairy products and frozen desserts quickly took processed food to the next ‘truly processed’ level. Processed dairy products and frozen products appeared later than many other processed food items, as their spread was dependent on the wide ownership of refrigeration units, both at the household level as well as at retail outlets, a change that came about in the 1990s.

Maggi Noodles²⁰ and Top Ramen were among the first processed food items of the ‘open and eat with minimal cooking’ kind to be launched in north India. While biscuits, health drinks like Horlicks, confectionary, ice cream, bottled carbonated drinks and a few other processed food items were already available, Maggi and Top Ramen revolutionised the market as evident in their outreach. Importantly, along with factory-produced ‘English bread’, called ‘double roti’, equally impressive in its outreach by this time, the uptake of Maggi and Top Ramen signalled a relaxation of the patrolling of the food boundary and restrictions on food processed outside the home. This was perhaps to be expected: once eating food outside became acceptable, it was only a matter of time before processed food from outside started to enter homes.

There was of course an established tradition of *halwai*—sweet meat or confectionary shops—in north India, which sold familiar sweets, fried snacks and dairy products.²¹ Such shops had been in business for generations and were well known to their customers.

¹⁹ To indicate the degree of ‘self-sufficiency’ in food processing, even families that did not grow their own wheat would have purchased grain and taken that grain to their preferred miller to be milled into flour. In this way, even something as common and ‘staple’ as the market-bought whole-wheat flour used in Australian households would have been considered commercially produced and processed by Indian standards.

²⁰ Launched in India in 1983. For more on Maggi noodles and how it became a national staple in India, see the 2015 online article by Michael Synder (2015) “How Maggi noodles became India’s favourite comfort food” <https://qz.com/india/337224/how-maggi-noodles-became-indias-favourite-comfort-food/> .

²¹ Anyone who has spent time in India would be familiar with the ‘institution’ of the halawai shop. Every neighbourhood has one. These are family owned vegetarian food businesses, which cater to the local every day demand for sweets, snacks and dairy products. They also provide catering arrangements for ritualistic feasts including those around major life cycle events such as births, deaths and marriages and play an important part in the preparation of offerings for Gods and meeting demand for sweets and savouries at the time of festivals. In recent years the more enterprising ones have added fast food and street food business to the traditional business. .

(More specifically, customers knew the caste of their *halwai*.) These shops also dealt in food items that were less strictly regulated by the norms of pollution and purity—fried items and dairy-based products, as opposed to water-based items.

Maggi was different from the *halwai*. It brought the anonymous and the unknown into the household, its outreach signalling the advancement in the packaging and distribution capacities of new corporate players. While in the case of Maggi, its secret of success was partly in its marketing strategy (i.e., its positioning as an anytime snack as opposed to a meal substitute), advancements in packaging and improvements in distribution systems and warehousing were central to the spread of processed food in general. Improvements in these systems expanded outreach and the market for processed food.

Where altogether new practices and products have been introduced, or where peripheral practices are concerned, changes appear to be quicker than for practices involving entrenched food items. Cadbury chocolates offers a case in point: despite a long presence in India and aggressive marketing, chocolate has remained an occasional treat. While some may give chocolates to friends and colleagues on festivals and birthdays, this has not replaced traditional Indian sweets as a gift item, especially where so-called auspicious occasions are concerned. Conversely, new products such as pasta and pizza have enjoyed greater success in shaping practices around their consumption. They did not have to dislodge an entrenched food item nor worry about practices of consumption around this entrenched item. Existing research suggests that food practices that are considered central to the identity of a group are more resistant to change than other food practices that are considered less important (Koçturk, 1995; Mellin-Olsen & Wandel, 2005). Practices related to meals are less likely to change than practices related to snacks. Within the category of meals, practices around breakfast and lunch are more likely to change with changes in a household's or a group's circumstances than are practices around dinner, the most important social meal of the day. Breakfast and snacks stand out as the areas in which processed food has been relatively more successful in dislodging established practices (Koçturk, 1995; Mellin-Olsen & Wandel, 2005).²²

²² Breakfast as a meal was never as well-defined in north India as lunch and dinner, nor were the practices around it, particularly as two rather than three square meals a day was the norm. Breakfast was further susceptible to change as time became a pressing concern in the mornings, especially in urban areas.

In India packaged snacks gained popularity on the back of convenience. While advancements in packaging helped with distribution and storage, the availability of products in assorted sizes helped to improve market penetration by expanding the size of the market to include those with small disposable incomes, such as daily wage earners. The strategy of small-sized packaging was so successful that it has since been replicated for most fast-moving consumer goods including shampoo, detergent, cooking oil and toothpaste. The availability of low-priced snacks in small, light packaging has resulted in the consumption of snacks at various times and situations: with tea in a roadside tea shop, in college canteens and on public transportation. While packaged snacks are widely consumed outside the home, they are also bought in larger packs for household consumption. Traditionally, snacks were made at home but this was labour intensive and time consuming. Many of these preparations required large spaces for processing and drying the snacks. Packaged snacks are an inexpensive alternative. However, many households still prepare potato chips and other snacks at home, though in smaller quantities than before, for *Holi* and *Diwali*, the two important Hindu festivals in north India. This practice is reminiscent of the festive use of sugar as a spice in western societies:

The usage of sugar as spice may have reached some sort of peak in the sixteenth century ... But the condimental use of sugar survives in a number of fringe areas ... Cookies or biscuits associated with the holiday season commonly combine sugar and spices (ginger, cinnamon, and pepper, for instance) in ancient ways ... Yet this apparent gravitation of sugar to ceremonial usage is deceptive ... Rather than being some shift in usage these condimental associations merely demonstrate what anthropologists have long contended—that the holidays often preserve what the everyday loses. The world in which sugar was used primarily as a spice is long vanished; now sugar is all about us. Like tipping one's hat or saying grace, baking and eating gingerbread is a way of reaching back. (Mintz, 1986, pp. 86–87)

The packaged snacks market has evolved in the last few years. Frozen snacks, both vegetarian and meat-based, have been introduced in the market by brands such as Godrej and McCain. Burgers, vegetable nuggets, chicken nuggets, kebabs and cheese balls are some of the popular snacks. These snacks are stored in freezers and grilled or fried when needed. Their convenience lies in the elimination of preparation time and the effort involved in preparing them, so hot snacks can be served at short notice. While frozen snacks have gained popularity, the market for them is constrained by the size of the

freezer in the average Indian kitchen and the cost of the product for consumers, especially when weighed against the convenience they provide²³.

If packaging and distribution helped businesses so did the conditions of urban living, such as the shrinking physical space of houses and the expanding engagement of women in productive labour. There was neither the time nor the space to carry out the large-scale processing of food, such as cleaning, washing, drying and grinding spices, lentils and wheat, or for making snacks such as potato chips, activities that require considerable effort, time and space to complete. Processed food products were sold as ‘convenience’ items, their ‘quality’ as good as their homemade alternatives. In advertising campaigns, skilled housewives, mothers-in-law or grandmothers, all discerning women with experience, appeared in magazines and on television endorsing processed products such as spices, butter and *ghee* (clarified butter).

Over time, improvements in infrastructure, the increased integration of women in the workforce, rising incomes and the emergence of a consumer culture further entrenched processed food in Indian kitchens. To the rhetoric of convenience were added the narratives of empowerment and safety. The earlier endorsers, housewives and elderly women, were replaced by successful, often young, professional looking women who knew what they wanted and had the resources to get it.

This shift in focus from quality, taste and being ‘reminiscent of home’ to safe and modern, endorsed by ‘modern’ women who are almost invariably portrayed as successful professionals, underlines the decline in the relative importance of women as home makers and the emergence of the ‘professional woman’, who is at ease in the public space while having the domestic sphere under control (Fatma, 2016). Processed products are her friends in this endeavour²⁴. Even where women do not work, they have come to increasingly rely on processed food items to the extent that making one’s own butter or *ghee* or drying whole spices at home and grinding them have come to represent ‘village folk’. This indicates a shift in the ideas of the desirable whereby workingwomen have

²³ The Indian food market is price sensitive. People have long been used to low food prices and even though food prices have climbed steadily in recent years diversity of options and price sensitivity of consumers means that demand for most food products continues to be highly price elastic.

²⁴ See for example the 2015 online article by Michael Synder (2015) “How Maggi noodles became India’s favourite comfort food” <https://qz.com/india/337224/how-maggi-noodles-became-indias-favourite-comfort-food/>

come to be idolised and productive wage labour has been privileged over unpaid reproductive labour. In this representation, reproductive labour oppresses women and holds them back from achieving their potential as individuals.

While processed foods might not have dislodged the importance of the meal and the role of women as the primary guardians of home food preparation, the availability of these products provides new avenues to express old identities and forge new ones.

1.4 Food Practices—Performative and Discursive Spaces of Modernity

1.4.1 Location—‘Modern’ places to eat for the Indian consumer

New food products often do not try to replace the existing ideas of ‘a meal’, but rather bring with them new concepts and stories to embed the consumption of these products. The concept of home delivery has been central to the stories that have established pizza across Indian towns and cities. Parties, weekend nights and movies at home, privileging individual preference, and freedom to choose through topping selection are some of the motifs that pizza companies have disseminated through successful advertising campaigns, established and then employed for product promotion:

In addition to spreading styles of consumption that become a basis of identity, cultural globalization also facilitates transnational movements of discourses that affect people’s lives around the world. Liechty argues that ‘parallel to, though largely subsumed within,’ the spread of consumerist materialism is a ‘subdiscourse or rhetoric of freedom, equality, independence and empowerment associated with modernity’ (Liechty, 2001: 34). (Derne, 2008, p. 26)

Multiplexes, shopping malls and their food courts, and western fast food outlets are all symbols of modernity, spaces in which people practice being modern. Of course, one can debate what it means to be modern—an idea that postcolonial states struggle with—but there is consensus that it has something to do with the west:

The nationalist struggle to bring about the end of colonial rule in India ... closely allied to the struggle to become modern. Indeed the two goals were usually seen to be so closely related as to be indistinguishable ... The interconnectedness of the aspiration to independent nationhood, and the desire to be modern, was not however an uncomplicated one ... When the very notion of ‘modern’ was derived from the West, indeed was seen to be embodied by Europe, how was one to become modern and yet remain Indian? (Seth, 2013, p. 273)

The entrenched mass consumer culture in the west has become increasingly influential in the current Indian understanding of modernity, in which modernity is increasingly

expressed through consumption (Baviskar & Ray, 2011; Brosius, 2010; Derne, 2003; Donner, 2008; Fernandes, 2006; Upadhya, 2011; Varma, 1998). Suddenly, everything is up for consumption; food, movies, literature and holidays are all means to practice and express modernity.

The emergence of this consumer culture underpins the success of a number of new food businesses. The timing of the arrival of western fast food companies in the mid-1990s, a time characterised by an increase in the disposable income of a large part of the population, along with large-scale dissemination of imagery of western modernity via satellite/cable television, also recently arrived in India, was crucial to their success.²⁵ In addition, their arrival also coincided with an increasing proportion of young people—those most willing to experiment and adopt new practices—in the total population, as well as increased public interactions between young unmarried men and women. Western fast food outlets were perfectly designed to cater to the requirements of these young people. KFC, McDonald's, Pizza Hut and Dominos had considerable success with their self-service outlets, which were air-conditioned, hygienic, and served inexpensive food, especially when compared to traditional high-end restaurants. Two decades later, the clientele of these western fast food outlets is predominantly young people and parents with young children, another segment of the market that these chains have targeted successfully through child-friendly menus, deals for birthday parties, toys for children and other features to attract children such as clowns and play areas.

Indian food businesses have also benefitted from the methods employed by foreign fast food companies, implementing small adaptations as a means to protect and promote their businesses. For example, *golgappas* (or *pani puris*) have benefitted from adopting plastic gloves for those serving the food and reverse osmosis (RO) water filters. These delicate fried puffed balls made of flour and served filled with sweet savoury water are a popular Indian street food. However, concerns about water quality and the spread of water-borne diseases discouraged people from eating them. When local food outlets started to use RO water and other hygienic practices such as gloves, people again became comfortable with eating *golgappas*. This revived what at one point appeared to be a dying business.

²⁵ In the 1977, an Indian company opened Nirula's, which is often referred to as the first Indian fast food outlet, in Delhi. It modelled itself on Western fast food outlets, but its outreach was limited and the larger social changes that would support Western fast food businesses more than a decade later were only just beginning to become visible.

The influences on operational practices and products of food manufacturers and sellers have not flowed in only one direction. Western food companies have adapted their product range to suit the Indian taste and wallet, be it the McAloo Tikki of McDonald's, *kadai paneer* pizza of Pizza Hut or the vegetarian menu of KFC. Conversely, while Haldiram and Bikanerwala²⁶ may have designed their outlets and packaging along the lines of western fast food outlets, these brands have not stopped there. Today they sell Italian food items such as pastas and pizzas as well as 'Indian Chinese' cuisine to name a few additions that they have made to their offerings. But the mainstay of their business model remains Indian street food. The enduring success of these businesses suggests that although there is a demand for new products offered by western food companies and, more generally, for foreign cuisines, this has not undermined the popularity of traditional Indian food items. Haldiram's turnover exceeds the combined turnover of McDonald's and Domino's:

Bhelpuri beats burgers just as comprehensively as farsan beats fries. Haldiram's revenue, at Rs 3,500 crore, is more than the combined revenue of Domino's (Rs 1,733 crore) and McDonald's (Rs 1,390 crore); adding topline of the two separate operations in India ... Whether in fast food or munchies, and despite the profusion of MNC [multinational corporation] brands with high cool quotient in both categories, good old-fashioned Indian offerings from Haldiram's still dominate the market. (Malviya, 2015)

As is described in more detail below, one of the reasons behind the success of western fast food outlets was, and to some extent still is, the space that they provide unmarried young couples to meet and 'date'; that is, in contrast to conservative public spaces of India, they provide a platform for the public enactment, in a relatively safe space, of the new social roles of boyfriend and girlfriend and what it means to 'be modern'. Going to McDonald's with one's girlfriend or boyfriend, having a burger and posting photographs of it on social media are as much a part of the new discourse of modernity as are multiplexes and popcorn and Pepsi. However, the links between food practices and modernity are not confined to these new spaces of modernity alone, nor were they necessarily forged after the liberalisation of the Indian economy.

Modernisation remains an ongoing project in India and modernity a mosaic of practices. Modern institutions coexist with traditional institutions such as caste, which continue to play an important role in society even if they have adapted to the new social and economic

²⁶ Popular Indian food chains and outlets

realities of India. The same continues to be the case with individual practices. More specifically through post-economic liberalisation and the proliferation of social media, satellite television, and the internet modernity is increasingly expressed through consumption practices. However, ‘modernity’ remains piecemeal and fragmented. As explored below, for the participant households and individuals there was no contradiction in being ‘traditional’ in certain areas – marriage for instance - while being ‘modern’ in others – the use of gadgets and appliances, reading papers and magazines, participating in electoral politics (although along communal lines), eating burgers and pizza and going to the movies. In this sense modernity is a reflected performance while tradition is an unreflected everyday practice mundane or otherwise. My study participants described modernity in terms of the choices people made or certain practices and not necessarily in terms of a consistently ‘modern’²⁷ political or social worldview. These choices could range from speaking English, to drinking alcohol, to ‘love’ marriage as opposed to ‘arranged’ marriage, to women wearing jeans, skirts, or trousers, to eating pasta and lesser known western dishes. Modernity was rarely if ever expressed by my study participants as a holistic idea in terms of the rights of minorities, freedom for individuals and groups to choose, denouncing violence against individuals and groups, universal rights etc. or even as anything that did not focus immediately on mundane individual or household choices.

1.4.2 ‘Safety’—Modernity in boxes and cans

When I was at school²⁸, students in my class knew very little about western countries. In those days international travel was rare and undertaken only by the very wealthy. What little we knew about developed western countries was gleaned from geography textbooks and hearsay. In this understanding, fact and fiction became indistinguishable. A classmate who had relatives in ‘America’²⁹ told me once that no one cooked food in that country, everyone ate out of boxes. A sharper contrast to my world could not be found.

While I did not actually milk a cow, something my father claimed he did every day as a young boy, I did walk every morning to the ‘dairy’, a shed with a few cows and water buffaloes, around the corner from my house. Once there, I carefully avoided stepping in

²⁷ By the use of the word ‘modern’ here, I mean a liberal social and political worldview.

²⁸ Late 1980s-early 1990s

²⁹ It was always America then and never USA or the US as it is called in India these days

cow dung, watched the milkman milk the cows (it was most important that the cow be milked in front of one's eyes, lest the 'unscrupulous' milkman adulterate the milk with water), bought milk and walked back home. We had to scrub vegetables clean before they could be used and during the monsoon season take the added precaution of soaking them in a solution of potassium permanganate to reduce the risk of infections and disease. Once cleaned and soaked, food had to be cooked and served in utensils, which had to be washed at the end of it all. Food could not be had without literally getting one's hands dirty. Half of the country's population was busy with food at any time. How could we hope to compete against people who spent so little time on such trivial matters as food as did the Americans? No wonder they were developed and modern and we were not.

Packaged food then became a trope for modernity for many Indians.³⁰ It offered an alternative to the chaos and dirt of underdeveloped and desperately poor India. If it appealed to the aspirations of educated Indians who dreamt of breaking free from the images of grinding poverty and uncertainty that characterised their country, it also spoke to their desire to manage their immediate environment even if they could not change the country itself.

Processed and packaged food products are a part of the larger strategy of risk management by the better-off sections of Indian society. This risk management also manifests itself in private power, water, schools, hospitals, shopping malls and gated residential communities. Fears about food quality have played an important role in driving the middle class to processed food. In this discourse, bottled drinking water is the answer to increasingly contaminated publicly supplied water; Tropicana and Real—packaged fruit juice and drink brands owned by Pepsico and Dabur, respectively—adorn the breakfast table, while fresh juice outlets are determinedly avoided; and while McDonald's and Barista, a coffee chain, are modern places to eat and 'hang out', a street hawker selling food is seen to be 'peddling disease'.³¹

³⁰When aerated drinks were first launched in cans in the 1990s, they became immensely popular even though canned drinks were at least twice as expensive as bottled drinks. This is because, in the imagination of many young Indians, people in the west consumed aerated drinks out of cans. Cans were promoted as a symbol of modernity, with smartly dressed teenagers in jeans and T-shirts walking around listening to music on their Walkman, cans of Pepsi or Coca Cola in hand. Canned drinks, like Walkman and unlike drinks in glass bottles, were unshackling.

³¹ Interestingly, the health risk from street foods may be no greater than that posed by foods or dishes from other sources such as restaurants (Abdussalam & Käferstein, 1993). Studies conducted in India (Bapat, 1992; Chakravarty, 1994) have come up with similar findings (see Campbell, 2011, p. 17).

Nor is the role of packaging—or for that matter, new public spaces of consumption—confined merely to meeting a perceived gap between the demand for clean and hygienic drinking water or juice or a pleasant venue to have a coffee and socialise. Hawkins (2013) stresses the active role played by packaging in not only providing a medium through which to consume another product, but also in shaping and giving birth to altogether new practices of consumption. From this perspective, something viewed historically as inert or passive and a response to market demands acquires its own agency and, in turn, shapes both the market and the nature of demand itself:

This account of market devices and performativity ... foregrounds the ways in which packaging acquires agency: specifically, the capacity to articulate new economic actions and cultural practices around food ... as packaging became a key 'fixture or furnishing' in food markets, it made a difference to how they operated, it intervened and shaped them in a multitude of ways ... Packaged goods have inaugurated a more mediated relationship to products in which consumers rely on indirect, written or visual information to access knowledge of what they are buying. (Hawkins, 2013, p. 71)

Commentators have written about the failure of urban authorities to organise the informal food sector in cities because the middle class sees it as an aesthetic challenge and a breeding ground for disease. Writing on attitudes of the urban middle class towards vendors, Sharit Bhowmik (n.d.) of WEIGO, an 'international network to secure the livelihoods of the working poor in the informal economy', writes:

Street vendors have existed since time immemorial. In recent times however they have come to be regarded as public nuisance by certain sections of the urban population. NGOs representing the elite sections, especially the residents' associations of the middle class and upper middle class, are most vocal about eviction of street vendors from their vicinity. In most of the large cities, such as Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai, Bangalore, these associations aggressively argue for restoration of pavements as public space only when street vendors 'encroach' on them. Bhowmik. (p. 3)

Sociologist Amita Baviskar echoes a similar sentiment when she writes of Delhi:

middle-class concerns about creating social and spatial order have contended with an unruly 'republic of the street' (Joyce 2003: 216). This republic, which accommodates an anarchic assembly of activities by variously situated social groups and individuals has faced a relentless momentum towards [transformation] ... The mission of 'cleaning up' the street has targeted those who inhabit its margins, including vendors of food and other inexpensive items of mass consumption, beggars, and performers. (Baviskar & Ray, 2011, p. 391)

1.5 Meat and Modernity—Qualitative and Symbolic Changes

1.5.1 What it means to ‘be vegetarian’

Quantitatively, meat is an insignificant part of the diet of those north Indian Hindus who eat meat. While it may be true that a majority of the Hindu population is not vegetarian, the *everyday* food practice among Hindus in north India is vegetarian.³² The quantity of meat consumed by Hindus who eat it and the frequency of consumption are so insignificant that such Hindus are separated from vegetarian Hindus not by what they actually eat but by the symbolic significance of the consumption of meat and its avoidance. In meat-eating Hindu households, most meals are vegetarian; meat is cooked only occasionally. When it is cooked, the meat dish is an addition to the everyday vegetarian meal. Some celebratory feasts may include two or more elaborate meat dishes, but most ritual celebrations and the feasts that precede or follow them do not allow for the consumption of meat.

Crotty (1993) emphasises the need to examine and understand food choices by looking at both the pre- and post-swallowing worlds of food and food practices. In simple terms, the pre-swallowing world refers to the social and cultural influences on food and eating, while the post-swallowing world centres on the nutritional aspects of eating, such as calories, protein, fats and carbohydrates and whether a diet is balanced. In this sense, for most north Indian Hindus who eat meat, its consumption is insignificant when viewed from the perspective of nutrition or the post-swallowing world, yet assumes great significance and acquires layers of meanings when viewed through the lens of the pre-swallowing world. This latter lens considers what it *means* to consume meat and the role of meat consumption in the identity formation of a north Indian Hindu and its signalling to oneself and others. When viewed in this way, meat becomes, among other things, a marker of caste, a signifier of martial status, a symbol of masculinity, and a sign of wealth and status. Most north Indian Hindus who eat meat are essentially vegetarians who sometimes eat small quantities of meat. Many abstain from meat regularly and some become vegetarian in their later years. Although growing, the annual per capita consumption of meat in India is still the lowest in the world. The average global annual per capita consumption of meat is estimated at 41.90 kilograms. In India, it is estimated to be

³² This observation of vegetarianism as the everyday food practice is reflected in the linguistic centrality of vegetarian food in Indian English, as shown by the use of a ‘vegetarian or non-vegetarian’ binary, compared to the implied binary in Australia of “‘normal” (i.e., omnivorous) or vegetarian’.

marginally above four kilograms (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2013). While it is true that the demand for animal products, including meat, has been growing for some time now, this increase is from very low base figures, so that in absolute terms the growth in meat consumption is rather insignificant. This is not to say that the practices of meat consumption among the Hindus of north India have remained unaltered. Far from being static, these practices have undergone rapid change. However, to explain away these changes in terms of a surging demand for meat would not only be inaccurate but also inadequate in capturing the qualitative nature and significance of the change.

The changes in the practices of meat consumption could be summed up as greater acceptance of meat by Hindus in north India, both by those who consume meat and those who do not. A simple but often unnoticed indicator of the greater social acceptance of meat is its greater visibility both commercially and socially. There are more and different types of shops selling meat. Many general stores and supermarkets now stock frozen and fresh meat products, something that would have until recently put-off most vegetarians and would have been discouraged at the pain of commercial boycott. Socially, it is served and consumed more frequently and often occupies the centre stage in the non-routine social consumption of food.

The change in attitudes towards meat consumption and the resulting change in consumption practices are better understood as *qualitative* changes, which primarily relate to the creation and re-creation of social identities. Importantly, the definition of what it means to be a vegetarian has been pushed outwards. For example, for many Hindus the term vegetarian no longer excludes the consumption of eggs. Caplan (2008) refers to the availability of ‘unfertilised’ eggs for vegetarians in the southern Indian city of Chennai in the 1980s. This indicates that the definition of vegetarian is no longer an uncontested given but is being renegotiated. An egg is no longer simply an egg; what matters is a technicality—that is, whether it is capable of life. In this example, science is contesting an established belief, to forge a new practice of food consumption that is compatible with the boundaries of a vegetarian Hindu identity.

At the household level, the definition of meat consumption has also been stretched. Today, many north Indian Hindus who eat meat but come from vegetarian households have pushed the definition of a ‘vegetarian household’ further by taking advantage of home delivery to order cooked meat to their homes. In such cases, the consumption of meat at home and the appearance of being a vegetarian household are delicately balanced

on the (re-)definition of a vegetarian household. Central to this (re-)definition is not whether its members consume meat but where the meat is cooked. In the common understanding today, a vegetarian household is not one in which no member of the household consumes meat, but one in which meat is not cooked at home. In this way, the definition of a vegetarian household has been relaxed further by excluding not only strict avoidance of meat at all times but also the site of its consumption. It should be noted that, for a long time, taking meat, cooked or uncooked, into a house was considered polluting. For many vegetarian households, it still is.

Undertaking a rich qualitative analysis of the household practices of meat consumption or avoidance offers significant insight into how Hindu identities are created and re-created in north India today. From this analysis, important insights emerge on the dynamic nature of identity, its constant negotiation and the multiplicity of definitions and ways of being.

1.5.2 Modernity and the modern body

Joshi (2001) in his book *Fractured Modernity: Making of a Middle Class in Colonial North India* cites an instance in which an educated Indian gentleman, on seeing an English couple breakfasting on lamb chops, attributes the backwardness of Indian culture and society to its food, citing meat-based dishes as the reason for European progress and resilience. The association of particular foods with projects of modernisation is not unique to Indian society. The ban on beef eating in Japan was revoked in 1872, and it was declared that the Emperor ate both beef and mutton (Klein, 2008). This ‘elevated [beef consumption] into the symbol of Japan’s transformation into a modern nation’ (Cwiertka, 2006, cited in Klein, 2008, p. 206). Gandhi, a staunch vegetarian, believed in his early years that adding meat to the Indian diet would not only result in stronger-bodied people to fight against the colonial power, but would also create conditions conducive to the modernisation of society by bringing down barriers of caste and dogma (Roy, 2002).

Meat eating is also associated with desirable bodies and, in the case of India, has been associated with good, strong bodies. Indeed, the healing and strength-imparting qualities of meat have been noted in classical Hindu Ayurvedic texts (Zimmermann, 1987). Michelutti (2008) shows how Yadavs—a pastoralist caste of north India—juggle multiple identities through avoiding or consuming meat. Yadavs are strictly vegetarian *at home*. This practice underlines their ritual status as descendants of Lord Krishna. However, Yadavs also consider themselves Kshatriyas (warriors) and accordingly strive to create a social image that is particularly ‘masculine’. Therefore, they consume meat and alcohol

at exclusively male parties. Consumption of meat and alcohol here is a symbol of masculinity and royal/warrior status and helps to construct a masculine social identity. This observation supports Zimmermann's (1987) argument that:

However disgusting meat may appear as seen against Brahminic norms, a diet based on meat is nevertheless prized from the point of view of a therapy to encourage strength and virility as concentrated within the person of the king by means of treatment. Such treatments involve aphrodisiacs and cures to promote youthfulness, in which meats play a major role. (pp. 184–85)

That the meat and alcohol parties of Yadavs are an all-male affair is neither surprising nor unique. Except among the tribal societies and the urban elite, alcohol consumption in India is almost exclusively a male domain. Recent government data suggests that less than 3 per cent of women in India consume alcohol (Prasad, 2009). Similarly, where it is allowed and practiced, meat consumption in India is, by and large, a male food practice. Even in societies in which meat consumption is not an aberration and is widely practiced, women—especially unmarried women and widows—are discouraged from consuming meat. This is because meat is ascribed heat-generating properties, associated in Ayurveda with increased libido (Donner, 2008).

In urban India, at least, the notion of a desirable body is has undergone a further transformation in the last two decades. The success of Sushmita Sen at the Miss Universe pageant in 1994 and further Miss World titles conferred on Indian women in the following years marked a watershed in the Indian definition of 'beautiful feminine bodies'. MacDonald (2010) notes how in the 2000s, the ideal female body type in India changed from 'plump and rotund' to 'lean and skinny'. The definition of the masculine body has undergone a similar change, noticed first in the bulging muscles of debutant Bollywood actor Salman Khan in the megahit *Maina Pyar Kiya* in 1989 and quickly becoming the norm among the young leading men of Bollywood. A young student quoted by the New York Times (Esselborn, 2013) captures the mood when he says:

I make sure that I eat enough protein. I eat chicken, lamb and fish. My body and my figure are very important to me ... If you limit your interests, you're limiting your life ... Even if I don't like everything, or don't like the taste, I still want to try everything, especially where food and drink are concerned. (Jaspreet Singh, student)

As eating meat is symbolically central to the creation of the masculine and modern social body, the sites and context of meat consumption are also central to the practice of being

modern. Cockerham (2005), arguing for the need to develop a health lifestyle theory and using an agency-structure approach to propose such a theory, observes that:

health in late modernity has become viewed as an achievement—something people are supposed to work at to enhance their quality of life or risk chronic illness and premature death if they do not. (p. 51)

Cockerham attributes this shift in attitude to three broad categories of development: (i) an ‘epidemiological transition from acute to chronic diseases’; (ii) a new modernity, which in the area of health manifests itself in ‘movement toward the mutual participation model ... where traditional industrial age centers of power and authority, such as medicine, are weakening, adopting a healthy lifestyle accords people more control over their life situation’; and, (iii) an ‘adjustment in primary locus of social identity ... consistent with Giddens’s (1991) assertion that lifestyles not only fulfill utilitarian needs, but also give material form to a particular narrative of self-identity’ (Cockerham, 2005, p. 52).

Seen from this perspective, and referring once again to the pre- and post-swallowing worlds, we find that in such an understanding of health, food and body, and the inter-linkages between them, it is the post-swallowing world of ingestion, nutrition and the likely material effect of food on health and body that takes primacy. Of course, it is important to note that the pre- and post-swallowing worlds are a schematic arrangement to facilitate understanding; they do not and cannot exist as mutually independent universes untouched by each other. The pre-swallowing world is influenced by the post-swallowing world and, in turn, influences it in a constant feedback loop. This is particularly true in a context in which food choices and the understanding of the nature of food and its impact on the body and health are rapidly changing. This flows from the already-discussed nature of the reflective creation and re-creation of identity, and body as the principal site of this identity creation and its expression.

1.5.3 Meat as the ‘food of good times’

In a paper published in 1988, Appadurai states that India did not have a national cuisine, as cooking practices were essentially regional and ethnic and rooted in medicine and morality. This may be changing, as Nandy (2004) notes:

During the last five decades, formal or ceremonial food in metropolitan India has increasingly come to be dominated by two cuisines, the Mughal and the Punjabi ... The process has been strengthened by the Indian diaspora and First

World patrons whose imagination of Indian food is limited and has, necessarily, a generic touch ... Partly this attitude has something to do with the ... concepts of ceremonial and everyday food and of food that can be legitimately served on formal, public occasions and in restaurants. (pp. 13–14)

The rise of Punjabi and Mughlai food, with kebabs and biryanis as their mainstay, has come to dominate the Indian cuisine, especially the celebratory. It is interesting to note that Mughlai cuisine is meat-based, while the popular Punjabi cuisine, itself a derivative of Mughlai cuisine, is also meat heavy. Further, the rise of these cuisines and the increased acceptance and consumption of alcohol have gone hand in hand:

Among the Hindus (who make up more than 80 per cent of India's population) alcoholic beverages are forbidden for Brahmins and other upper-caste groups who are strict vegetarians. Members of all other caste groups who are meat eaters (e.g., the warrior, farmer, and scavenger-untouchable castes) are permitted to drink. (Bennett et al., 1998, p. 247)

This too may have changed according to a paper on alcohol consumption in India:

The country ... is fast shedding its inhibitions about alcohol as a lifestyle choice. This situation has led to fears of an undocumented rise in alcohol abuse not only among poorer classes but also in sections of society that were previously considered dry. The concern, say experts, is that there has been a rapid change in patterns and trends of alcohol use in India. Chief among them is people are beginning to drink at ever-younger ages. (Prasad, 2009, p. 17)

The findings from my research, discussed in detail in the following chapters suggest that alcohol and meat go together not only because of their association with masculinity but also because there is a perception in India that alcohol should be consumed with 'nutritious' food, and meat is 'nutritious' food par excellence. Where men do not drink at home, as is the case in many households, they drink in public places, mostly in the immediate proximity of alcohol shops. Invariably, such places are lined with hawkers and shops selling eggs and cooked meat dishes.

The centrality of meat and alcohol to (secular) festivity, sociality and hospitality among men engaged in the practice of non-kinship sociality can also be seen as a manifestation of the shift in the relative importance of social relations. As seen through my research described in more detail below, meat and alcohol would not be freely served to family members and relatives. Where these items are served at all, they would be regulated by strict norms about when and with whom one can consume them. In non-kinship sociality, meat and alcohol together have become a marker of hospitality and festivity, essential to this new sociality in which new norms and practices of such secular social engagement

are being established. Where meat and alcohol cannot be served on a social occasion for religious or social reasons, for example the presence of family elders or women, new social events have been invented around meat and alcohol, to satisfy the hosts that they have ‘hosted well’ and the guests that they have been looked after well. Receptions after weddings and ‘cocktail’ parties before and after weddings, where alcohol and meat are freely served, are examples of these newly added secular social events to mark festivity.

1.6 The Developmental State and its Imaginings

Food practices are influenced by state interventions, both incidental and direct. Investment in infrastructure and the liberalisation of the economy, for example, have had an incidental influence on food practices. More directly, modern states regularly collect data on the health of their citizens and issue nutritional guidelines and health advisories as part of the larger project of managing their populations (Foucault, 1975/1977, 1980). The direct influence that public policy has on food practices and nutritional outcomes is illustrated when contrasting the effect of state interventions in India and China in the 1950s and 1960s. As Dreze and Sen (1989) explain in *Hunger and Public Action*, while China improved its population’s life expectancy through health care and food distribution, it also experienced one of the worst famines in human history in 1958–1961. Contrastingly, India avoided famine. Given India’s democratic political environment, it was politically more important to avoid starvation deaths, which would have grabbed media headlines, than to worry about chronic hunger.

In India, the idea of state intervention in food practices began to crystallise as part of the struggle for independence from British rule. Famines took a massive toll on human life during colonial rule—a loss that the nationalists believed could have been avoided had India been in control of her own resources. The incremental establishment of the Public Distribution System (PDS) post-independence and the green revolution in the 1960s are two related examples of the Indian state reshaping food availability and access to it, and through this food practices, fundamentally and on a massive scale. The PDS was established to make essential food, cereals in particular, available at subsidised rates, with the aim of improving access to food. At the same time, the green revolution aimed to improve the productivity of agriculture, with the objective of making India self-reliant in

food production. Improved agricultural output would feed into the PDS, which, in turn, would feed India's underfed millions³³.

The green revolution was favourable to irrigated crops, wheat in particular, but unfavourable to rain-fed crops, in particular millets, the main cereal of a large proportion of the country's population. The PDS and the green revolution introduced wheat to areas that produced and consumed millets, and rice to areas that produced wheat, rather dramatically changing the acreage under different crops and the food practices of a vast majority of the country's population (Nelson et al. 2019).

State interventions have also changed the availability of animal products and the practices of their consumption through efforts to promote the dairy and, more recently, meat industries. The promotion of the dairy industry, as part of 'Operation Flood'³⁴, also referred to as the 'white revolution', has made India the world's leading producer of milk. The 'pink revolution' to promote meat may be more recent, but the state has a long history of promoting poultry, since the early years of five-year planning in India³⁵. As a result, poultry, once a risky proposition because of diseases (e.g., Ranikhet disease, also known as Newcastle disease) and resultant widespread bird mortality, started to take off in the 1980s and chicken, once a rare item of meat and quite expensive, became more commonly available. Indirectly, the green revolution made cheap maize, the main component of poultry feed, available in large quantities, bringing down the price of chicken relative to other meats (Hellin et al., 2015). As a result of these developments, the poultry industry in India has been growing at a faster rate than any other major agricultural sub-sector and chicken has emerged as the meat of choice for most meat-eating Hindus in north India, replacing the once popular goat's meat.

If the state can promote certain food practices it can discourage others, and in doing so both defines the body as a site of control and shapes the conception of what is healthy. Goszczyński and Wójtewicz (2018) draw attention to four ideal types of embodiment: the efficient body, the authentic body, the busy body and the responsible body (Belasco, 2016). 'The efficient body is a body which is conscientiously managed or even controlled

³³ For more on the Public Distribution System (PDS) in India please refer to <http://www.fao.org/3/x0172e/x0172e06.htm>

³⁴ Launched in 1970.

³⁵ Early initiatives aimed to supplement nutrition and income of rural households under various schemes including Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP).

by the individual and the society’ (Goszczyński and Wójtewicz 2018, p. 134). Most people are aware of the levying of heavy taxes on alcohol and tobacco by states to discourage people from using them. Recently, the southern Indian state of Kerala imposed a ‘fat tax’ with the aim to control the growing problem of obesity (Menon, 2016). These are, at least in appearance, benign examples of state intervention to shape food practices. However, not all such interventions would be considered benign.

1.6.1 State promotion of ‘Hindu identity’

The government of the Hindu nationalist BJP-ruled state of Madhya Pradesh was in the news in 2015 for discontinuing the practice of giving eggs to school children as part of the midday meal program. This program aims to attract children to school by offering them meals, while also reducing the incidence of malnutrition among children of school-going age. Eggs are a particularly effective and inexpensive source of protein and can be helpful in reducing the incidence of malnutrition in children. However, they have been removed from school lunch menus because the BJP government does not think that serving eggs in school is ‘right’ (i.e., that it is not in accordance with Hindu practices). The state Rural Development Minister justified the decision claiming ‘eggs are against social values of the state where most people are vegetarian’. However, as per a 2006 survey of food practices, only 35 per cent of the state’s population is vegetarian (Das, 2014). If eggs are considered incompatible with the social values of an Indian state by its government, beef is an abomination to many Hindus.

A progressive tilt towards Hindu nationalist politics has marked the last two decades of political developments in India. It may just be a coincidence that economic liberalisation in India and a tilt to Hindu nationalism coincide but many writers have drawn attention the links between the rise of the consumerist middle class and its markers, which radically altered the Indian political scene (Das, 2011; Khanna, 2001; Mankekar, 1999; Rajagopal, 2001). In Nehruvian dispensation, diversity was allowed to be reflected in language and culture but not in politics: ‘You can come and do your folk dances on Republic Day, but don’t tell us you are Bodo, we don’t want to know what that is’ (Das, 2000, cited in Mazzarella, 2005, pp. 9–10). In the current political scenario, ‘culture’ is central to politics (Hansen, 1999, 2001; Wyatt & Hewitt 2004). Osella and Osella (2008), examining Hindu and Muslim food practices and the imagination of identity in Kerala, conclude:

It is clear that Kerala Hindus' post-1930 capitulation to vegetarian normativity is a product of an earlier wider Hindu reformism ... contemporary vegetarianism cannot, sadly, be separated from its links to Hindu nationalism and fundamentalism. Post-Independence, Hindus have been drawn into the rhetorics of the nation, increasingly encouraged to act and think according to the logics of Hindu dominance, and have become accustomed to think according to the purificatory logics which figure the Indian nation not as plural but as Hindu and which insist upon purging the non-Hindu—even to the extent of imposing 'beef bans' on Christians and Muslims. (p. 184)

Even though there are a number of Hindu organisations and social movements allied to political views that espouse vegetarianism as their goal, there is not enough evidence to conclude that vegetarianism is being 'systematically' promoted by the state as a 'Hindu' practice. However, there is evidence to suggest that the BJP lends its tacit support to restrictions on meat and espouses outright ban on the sale and consumption of beef.

This is evident in legislation to suppress and ban the sale of beef to the extent of criminalising it in a number of BJP-ruled states, including Maharashtra and Haryana, and the increased patrolling of cow slaughter and beef consumption by Hindu vigilante groups, who are willing to use violent methods to exercise their 'mandate'. The focus on beef would also seem to fit with the right-wing Hindu agenda of subsuming the multiple and diverse Hindu identities within one bounded group that distinguishes the Hindu collective from the Muslim other. In addition, it proves valuable in singling out Hindus transgressors, who condone the consumption of beef or, worse, consume it themselves, in what right wing Hindu groups would call misguided expression of secularism and modernity.

1.7 The Anthropology of Food

In discussing the above factors that influence changing practices in meat consumption, I have tried to establish how the changes in what Mintz (1996) calls *outside meaning* might have set the boundaries for, and led to changes in, the *inside meaning* of meat. Individuals, families and communities have to adjust to changes in outside meaning or context and integrate the changes into their lives by modifying their daily practices. I adopt this approach in my research to understand the current practices of meat consumption among the Hindus of north India, and through this analysis shed some light on the creation and re-creation of Hindu identity.

In the opening section of *Remembrance of Repasts: An Anthropology of Food and Memory*, David Sutton (2001) recalls being bluntly asked, 'why would anyone want to

remember what they had eaten?’ and, when seeking advice on how to approach the topic of food and memory, being told to ‘try Proust’ (p. 1). Through this recollection, Sutton presents his view that despite the recent increase in work in anthropology on food, the area remained on the periphery of the discipline.

The anthropology of food has come a long way since Sutton’s book in 2001,

although food has long been a topic of anthropological research, interest in food exploded in the 1990s...the food quest is a constant search for the aesthetic or the authentic, for contemplation or entertainment, for study, or for staking moral and political positions, food continues to consume us. We are still in the midst of a food studies surfeit: a 2016 indexed list counted over 30 current food studies journals (Antrosio and Han, 2016).

Today, anthropology departments in most universities around the world offer courses on the anthropology of food. There is also a large and growing body of literature on this thematic area. In the case of India too, there is existing literature, both anthropological and from other fields of enquiry, which could be drawn upon to further the scope of the anthropology of food in India. This said, the anthropology of food in India though growing is still limited in scope and coverage (on this topic, see Baviskar (2012)). Therefore, it is understandable that there are a number of misconceptions about food practices in India, both among Indians—Hindus and non-Hindus—and foreigners interested in India. This is especially true of practices of meat consumption. I speak from experience.

The social and geographical context of my childhood in India convinced me that eating meat was wrong. I was born into a vegetarian Hindu family in north India. My relatives, who had never moved too far from home, avoided even onion and garlic.³⁶ This was the milieu in which my early socialisation took place. It convinced me that most Hindus did not eat meat.

Years later I went overseas; every time I was invited to share a meal, I would be asked if I were a vegetarian. I thought this was because most Hindus did not eat meat. Whether

³⁶ The story of the evolution of onion and garlic is instructive and worth citing here. Legend has it that once the master of a hermitage went away for a few days, leaving his Brahmin disciples in charge of the hermitage. The disciples, who had developed a taste for meat, took advantage of the absence of their master and started cooking and feasting on meat in the hermitage. Unfortunately for them, the master returned sooner than expected. To conceal their transgression, the disciples buried the meat in a corner of the hermitage. Sometime later, onion and garlic plants grew in the spot where the meat had been buried.

that was indeed the case or it was mere politeness that prompted the question I couldn't say. Thinking about it, however, I suspect that the image of India as a 'vegetarian nation' had some role in motivating the question.

By the time I returned to India in 2010, economic liberalisation had firmly taken root, with the seed planted in 1991 starting to bear fruit, at least for a section of the population. One result of this was that there was now more available to consume. KFC, McDonalds and Pizza Hut were doing brisk business, as were home-grown outlets emulating the western multinationals, and those selling kebabs and *biryanis*. When I was growing up meat was not easily visible; only some meat shops in some parts of cities and towns sold meat. Meat was not served at social gatherings, at least not in the social circle that I moved in. Now it was visible everywhere. Many more shops were selling it and it was being served regularly at dinners and lunches. Not only was meat being served at social gatherings, it also appeared to be the food of choice for many. Something had changed, and it was with the desire to learn about this change that I decided to find out more about meat consumption in India.

With the exception of Francis Zimmermann's book, *The Jungle and the Aroma of Meats: An Ecological Theme in Hindu Medicine* (1987), there very is little work that specifically looks at meat consumption among Hindus in India. What work there is—mostly in the form of journal articles, press reports and industry assessments—considers meat eating either in primarily simple economic terms as a function of increased prosperity, or through the lens of complex caste practices that are perceived as immutable, and in which high-caste Hindus, especially Brahmins, do not eat meat and vegetarianism is viewed as the desirable practice for Hindus.

1.7.1 Hindu food: Vegetarian in conjecture, varied in practice

Hindu food evokes the image of vegetarian food. Indeed, non-Hindus and vegetarian Hindus often believe that most, if not all, Hindus are vegetarians. This is not without reason. Modern descriptions of Hinduism often refer to the concept of *ahimsa* or 'non-violence' as advocating a vegetarian diet, Brahminical Hindu deities are only offered vegetarian food, and the ritual food is vegetarian. Then there is Gandhi, the Mahatma, the father of the Indian nation, and an iconic vegetarian.

However, the image of Hindus as vegetarians is also due in no small part to the colonial encounter, whereby Europeans portrayed Hindus as profoundly spiritual and mystical:

As Europeans have always tended to do, they created Hinduism in their own image. Their study of Hinduism confirmed their beliefs and Hindus emerged from their work as adhering to something akin to undogmatic Protestantism. Later generations of Europeans, interested themselves in mysticism, were able to portray the Hindus as mystics. (Marshall, 1970, cited in King, 1999, p. 159)

The colonial encounter emphasised the Hinduism of peace and non-violence—no doubt a useful narrative for the colonial enterprise. Practices that did not fit this paradigm were sidelined. For example, Gods and Goddesses with more violent preferences, such as the Goddess Kali who prefers offerings of blood, are seen as marginal and deviant, as in the 1980s classic film *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*.

As King (1999) explains, the mystical or spiritual emphasis that predominates in the Romanticist conception of India is not just a prevalent theme in contemporary western images of India, but has also exerted significant influence upon the self-awareness of Indians themselves. Hindus see their own practices through the colonial lens—a lens of non-violence and pacifism. Academic work on food practices in India has reinforced this impression by predominately studying the food practices of Brahmins, finding them to be vegetarian and extrapolating this finding to draw pan-Indian generalisations about food practices and ‘desirable’ food practices (1966/1970; Khare, 1976a, 1976b; Marriott, 1968). Further, many of the early Indian researchers who studied their country were Brahmins, who found in their research a bit of themselves.

This understanding of Hindu food practices is guided by the notion of parallel hierarchies of caste and food. Vegetarian food, which sits at the top of the food hierarchy, separates vegetarian Brahmins from other Hindus who may eat meat. Beef consumption separates caste Hindus from scheduled castes, the latter being at the bottom of the caste hierarchy and consuming food that sits at the bottom of the food hierarchy (Ambedkar, 1948).

1.7.2 Anthropology of food: More to less deterministic

The writings on food in anthropology date back to at least the late nineteenth century;³⁷ though as an area of inquiry, anthropology of food begins to take shape much later through many influential works - Levi-Strauss (1965), Douglas (1966), Goody (1982), Bourdieu (1984), Mintz (1986, 1996), Connerton (1989) and Sutton (2001) – to name a

³⁷ As explained in Mintz and Du Bois (2002), ‘Garriek Mallery’s paper, “Manners and meals” (1888), appeared in Volume 1, No. 3, of the *American Anthropologist*. William Robertson Smith’s *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (1889) contains an important chapter on food’.

few. The argument in these works runs along the following lines: even though humans are omnivores, every society distinguishes between what its members can and cannot eat; food is a marker of identity (Mintz, 1996). Food establishes belonging to a group and separation from other groups; it marks boundaries and flags distinction (Bourdieu, 1972/1977).³⁸ Food preferences are internalised over time and are central to societies' understanding of themselves and their pasts (Connerton, 1989). Bourdieu (1984) makes a similar point when he writes:

It is probably in tastes in food that one would find the strongest and most indelible mark of infant learning, the lessons which longest withstand the distancing and collapse of the native world and most durably maintain nostalgia for it. (p. 79)

In keeping with overall movement away from determinism in many social sciences, anthropology of food too has become less deterministic injecting progressively stronger doses of human agency and possibility of mutation. In the above works, chronologically cited as they are, one notices a movement away from structuralist binary rigidity to a more nuanced understanding of how food choices are made by individuals by employing an element of choice. Nevertheless, the underlying emphases on socialisation and memory and rooted group identities remain the recurring motifs in these works.

Early exploration of food practices in India and references to them can be found in the works of M.N. Srinivas (1962, 1966), Marriott (1968), Dumont (1966/1970), Khare (1976a, 1976b, 1992) and Khare and Rao (1986). These works are set in rural communities and look at the food practices of discrete caste groups. The understanding of practices is guided by the notion of parallel hierarchies of caste and food and food-related practices. For example, Brahmins, who are at the top of the caste hierarchy, consume ritually the most desirable food; that is, simple vegetarian food. They cannot eat with non-Brahmins and cannot receive cooked food from non-Brahmins. The social dynamics of the community is thus inferred from an understanding of its food practices, such as what is consumed, whom food is consumed with, whom food can be taken from and whom it cannot be taken from.³⁹

These works share the common characteristics of being focused on Hindu cosmology and the ideas of purity and pollution. They focus on kinship groups, commensality,

³⁸ The term 'distinction' as used here is a reference to the signalling of difference or separation.

³⁹ Similarly, Appadurai (1988) uses food to study household power dynamics.

characteristics of food as hot and cold, rituals of cooking, food preparations and sharing to mark festivals, harvests and life-cycle events. These works draw a strong link between caste affiliation and food practices, with caste identity having an exclusive or near exclusive influence on food practices.

Important though these works are in understanding food practices in orthodox or traditional Hindu society, they give little insight into the *current* food practices of a large percentage of Indians, the recent changes in these practices and the influences on these practices. Noting this gap, Nandy (2004) points out:

Developments have induced subtle changes in the cultural status and meanings of Indian cuisines, taking place mostly outside the range of vision of nutritionists, ethnographers and columnists writing on food or restaurants. Few seem aware that the traditional concerns of ethnography of food—the cooked and the raw, the pure and the polluted, commensality and its absence, the sanctified and the profane—have merged now with a new, more fluid politics of food in countries like India. (p. 10)

In some ways, Arjun Appadurai (1988) departed from the traditional focus on Hindu cosmology. In his paper ‘How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India’, Arjun Appadurai notes, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, that India has historically not had a national cuisine, which he attributes to cooking being embedded in ‘moral and medical beliefs’ on the one hand and cooking traditions being regional and ethnically bound on the other. Thus, the findings from recent surveys on meat consumption referred to in this chapter suggest that north India has a higher percentage of vegetarians than in east, south and west India (with the exception of the state of Gujarat).

Within this broad regional pattern, Brahmins and other high castes are more likely to have more stringent practices around the consumption and avoidance of meat. In particular, Brahmin and Vaishya castes are more likely to be vegetarian and Kshatriyas more likely to consume meat but within clearly delineated practices (and not simply a matter of individual circumstances). Of course there are caste groups among high caste Hindus whose meat eating or avoidance may have less to do with their location in the caste hierarchy and more to do with historical factors. For instance Kayasthas whose main occupation was as clerks to Muslim rulers must have adopted some of the meat eating practices of their masters while shedding some of their inhibitions around meat eating associated with their religious and caste identity. In that sense, the relationship between the avoidance and consumption of meat and the position in the caste hierarchy is not as clear-cut and straight forward as is made out

to be. However, it is a schematic portrayal of a complex reality and to that extent serves a useful purpose.

Whilst these broad generalisations about food practices continue to have validity, Appadurai suggests that with the rise of print media, emergence of cookbooks and the deepening and widening of the middle class, food practices independent of moral and medical beliefs and prescriptions may finally be emerging. Since then, Conlon (1995), Narayan (1995) and Buettner (2012) have worked on the dynamic nature of food and related practices in India. Conlon's work has focused on eating out in Bombay (now Mumbai) as both a product and manifestation of modernity, while Narayan's work focuses on the role of food in the conceptualisation of self and the other in colonial and postcolonial India. Buettner's paper deals with multiculturalism in the United Kingdom, tracing the journey of the South Asian diaspora and limits to its acceptance by looking at the chequered relationship between the British people and South Asian food.

1.7.3 But still deterministic

In a more concerted effort to improve understandings of food and related practices in South Asia, the Centre for South Asian Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, launched at the end of 2002 a new project titled 'The cultural meaning of food in South Asia' to provide a forum to discuss key issues concerning food and South Asia, such as food and religion, food and the body, food and the diaspora, and the commodification of food. Among other things, this endeavour led to a special issue on 'food in South Asia' in *South Asia Research* in 2004. More recently, in 2008 *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* published a special issue titled 'Food, Memory, Pleasure, and Politics'. This issue focused on food as a marker of identity, and especially on the vegetarian–non-vegetarian divide in India.

While the papers in these issues, especially in 'Food, Memory, Pleasure, and Politics', touch on current practices around meat consumption and avoidance, the debate continues to be couched in terms of the binary of the vegetarian Brahminical system and everything else that stands in opposition to it.

The contributors underline the prescriptive nature of food choices available to people and communities. In her editorial note for 'Food, Memory, Pleasure, and Politics', Caroline Osella underlines what she sees as the stifling effect of this 'ironclad' system of food

practices among Hindus. When discussing her experience of sharing a meal with a Muslim friend in India, Osella (2008) recalls:

She reached across to my plate, took the piece and began to chew it with relish. It was true, then! Here, issues of caste pollution and *juthu*⁴⁰ did not exist! It is almost impossible to register the degree of shock (and sense of liberation) that Shahida's act provoked in me'. (p. 2)

In the same issue, Chigateri (2008) questions the graded hierarchy of animals in which it is better to kill and eat some than others and the idea of non-violence as the basis of vegetarianism, while also noting the symbolic and physical violence inflicted by high castes in India to maintain sanctions against meat eating, particularly beef. Osella and Osella (2008) couch the differences between Hindu and Muslim food practices in Kerala, a state in south India, in terms of the increasing communalisation of the state:

The twentieth-century adoption of vegetarianism across a range of situations even by Kerala's lower castes (such as OBC Izhavas) reveals a capitulation to Brahminical logics and ... contemporary vegetarianism cannot, sadly, be separated from its links to Hindu nationalism and fundamentalism. (pp. 183–184)

Staples discusses how meat consumption is used as 'a weapon of the weak'. In particular, Staples (2008) touches upon how 'lower-caste' converts to Christianity use beef eating to subvert the dominant Brahminical value system:

Meat—and particularly beef—was important as a marker of identity and, in the political struggle for improved rights, of superiority and modernity. Many types of food—despite, or perhaps because of their usual connotations—were ripe for appropriation by particular interest groups to signify particular meanings. In certain contexts, for example, the provision of particular meat dishes as part of a meal was status enhancing rather than indicative of low status. (p. 37)

The purpose of citing a few recent papers on meat eating and vegetarianism in India is to highlight that the following impressions appear to continue to underpin discussions on meat eating in India:

- High-caste Hindus are vegetarian under the influence of Brahminical Hinduism. If they are not vegetarian, they still prefer vegetarian food and are hostile to beef eating.

⁴⁰ 'Juthu' is the Hindu notion that food that has been touched by another person should not be consumed.

- Not only are Hindu food practices essentially vegetarian, they are also immutable.
- The Hindu–non-Hindu divide is expressed in food practices; hitherto meat-eating Hindu communities are converting to a vegetarian diet under the influence of political right-wing Hinduism, which aims to grab power by converting Hinduism into a monolithic religion.
- Non-Hindus and lower-caste Hindus consume meat, particularly beef, to establish their distinct identity and as a protest against caste Hindu hegemony.

Whilst many of the papers in the special issue cited above highlight the changes taking place in the food practices of Hindus, especially those by Donner, Staples, and Caplan Brahminical Hinduism and vegetarianism, caste and food practices, and trenchant opposition of beef consumption by caste Hindus remain the most dominant lenses and areas of enquiry, and overarching narratives of meat consumption and avoidance.

1.8 Hindu Food Practices: Anything but Deterministic

While contemporary anthropological research on meat consumption in India reinforces the impressions outlined above, over the past decade newspaper articles and magazine features have drawn attention to the increasing meat consumption in India, as illustrated by the quotations below:

[There is] brisk trade in ‘non-veg’, especially with those who have studied abroad ... Things like Thanksgiving, which was never celebrated over here in Mumbai, is now being celebrated every year. The new generation are cool with eating anything (Menezes, co-Manager, Cafe Ridge food store). (NY Daily News, 2013)

Meat consumption, which was once dependent on parental sanction, is going up rapidly with more liberal attitudes and greater Western influences ... Imported pork products such as smoked ham, bacon and prosciutto, as well as chorizo and fuet, are best-sellers (Mohit Khattar, Managing Director, Nature's Basket, Godrej Group). (Sreeraman, 2011)

People eat vegetarian at home, so they look down on it to some extent. People feel if they have to celebrate they have to eat meat (Vikram Doctor, food writer, Mumbai). (Sreeraman, 2011)

Commenting on changing attitudes towards meat consumption in India, Nandy observes that India might prove McMichael (2005) right when he writes:

Diets have a political history framed by class, cultural and imperial relations. Animal protein consumption signals rising affluence and emulation of Western

diets. Movement up the food chain hierarchy (from starch, to grain, to animal protein and vegetables) is identified with modernity. (cited in Nandy, 2004, p. 10)

If correct, this raises questions about the manner in which food practices, especially around meat consumption, continue to be conceptualised in India. It would appear that there is much more to explore in the realm of meat consumption in India than simply caste relationships and religious identities.

When historian D.N. Jha's book *The Myth of the Holy Cow* was first published in 2002, it outraged public opinion in India. The crux of Jha's argument was that beef eating was not uncommon among Vedic Hindus⁴¹ and, in fact, the current practice of taboo on beef consumption did not consolidate until the medieval period. Jha had evidence to support his claims but to most Hindus, used to venerating the cow, he appeared to be striking at the very heart of their religious beliefs, and there were shrill calls for the book to be banned. So strong is the belief that Hinduism espouses vegetarianism that any reference to permissibility to consume meat generally and beef in particular is likely to arouse strong sentiments among many Hindus.

Strong evidence shows that animal sacrifice was central to Vedic Hinduism. However, it was also expensive for common people and gave priests (Brahmins) enormous power. When Buddhism and Jainism started to preach non-violence or *ahimsa* and a move away from the practice of animal sacrifice, common people saw an escape from both the expense involved in such sacrifice and the stranglehold of Brahmin priests, and they started to leave Hinduism in large numbers. To stem this exodus, Hinduism carried out internal reforms and gradually adopted vegetarianism (Doniger, 2009).

Brahminical Hinduism might have adopted vegetarianism, but vegetarianism was by no means the only model of food practices. Many high-caste and low-caste Hindus continued to eat meat. Vegetarianism in its essential form was restricted to Brahmins. However, the dominant discourse on food in India continues to be couched in terms of the cultural desirability of vegetarian food. In this discourse, Brahmins are vegetarians and others,

⁴¹ Vedic Hinduism refers to the early Hinduism practiced roughly until the sixth century BC. This early version of Hinduism was markedly different from later Hinduism in that it revolved around religious practices prescribed in the Vedic scriptures, including nature worship and animal sacrifice. The current Hindu pantheon of Gods led by Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh (Shiva) was not known; instead, Indra the God of rain was the pre-eminent God. Other Gods included Vayu (wind), Agni (fire), Varun (water) and Kuber (the God of the netherworld).

while not always vegetarian, accord higher ritual status to vegetarian diets and strive towards such food preferences, especially on public and religious occasions. Further, the discussion on food habits is inextricably linked to caste and kinship ties, food and customs around food are considered as given and immutable, and there is little room for individual choice or agency.

This is perhaps because western scholars and commentators interested in India focused their attention on classical Hinduism and Brahminical practices, including food practices, and attributed to Indian societies the ‘neatness’ and uniformity that they ‘believed’ existed in their own societies. Louis Dumont’s *Homo Hierarchicus* (1966/1970) was perhaps the most influential work in shaping the image of Hindu society in the western psyche, and from there conveying it back to India. India, as with many colonial countries, has ‘discovered’ herself through the work of western scholars of Indian culture, including Sir Charles Wilkins, who first translated the *Gita*, and Max Muller, the pre-eminent German scholar of India. Louis Dumont’s name would also easily figure in any list of influential western commentators on India.

For Dumont, the basis of the caste system and of Hindu society more generally is found in the notion of pure and impure. Pure and impure are the basis of social hierarchy, the separation of groups by restrictions on direct and indirect contact, and the division of labour. Ritual purity demands ritually pure food; that is, vegetarian food. Those situated lower down the hierarchy emulate the practices of those higher up. Dumont may well have been guided by Levi-Strauss’s idea of the ‘culinary triangle’ (1965) in formulating his own understanding of Hindu food practices. However, such neat compartmentalisation as seen in the idea of culinary triangle would be inadequate to capture the complexity of food practices of a country as diverse and complex as India.

1.8.1 Growing demand for meat: Class over caste

In addition to the presence of a large meat-eating population in India, there is also evidence to suggest that the nature of meat consumption in India is changing. Recent data (OECD, 2017) suggest that the consumption of meat products in India is on the rise. Per capita meat consumption is at the highest level recorded and is growing. Policy reports and papers on the animal products sector of the economy show strong growth and forecast bright prospects for the animal products sector (Dastagiri, 2004; Gandhi & Mani, 1995; Sinha & Giri, 1989).

Animal husbandry has historically been quite important to the Indian economy in general and the agricultural sector in particular. In a widely cited paper, Marvin Harris (1966) eloquently argued the place and importance of cows in the Indian system. Today, animal products account for about a third of the total agricultural sector output. While the agricultural sector has been nearly stagnant over the last decade, registering an average annual growth rate of only about 2 per cent, the animal products segment has been growing quickly, and accounted for 37 per cent of the agricultural output growth between 2005 and 2011. Meat and eggs have been the star performers of the animal product segment. NSSO surveys suggest that the demand for chicken meat grew at a compound annual growth rate of 20 per cent between 2005 and 2010 (Money Life Digital Team, 2013 citing Credit Suisse research). The total meat production in India has grown from 764,000 tonnes in 1970–71 to 6.27 million tons in 2010. This puts the compound annual growth rate over the last two decades for the sector at 4.5 per cent. Meat from bovine sources accounts for almost 41 per cent of the total meat output in the country. Of that, 57 per cent of bovine meat comes from buffaloes, while the remaining 43 per cent comes from cows and related species. Poultry accounts for 37 per cent, goats and sheep for 14 per cent, pork for 5 per cent and other species account for 3 per cent of the meat produced in the country (Suri, 2012).

While consumption data are limited in their ability to shed light on the changing social practices surrounding food consumption, they do reveal a significant change in the food that is being purchased by households at an aggregate level. At the household level, the percentage of expenditure on food dropped from 73.6 per cent to 55 per cent between 1970 and 2005 (Gandhi & Zhou, 2010), indicating an increase in the disposable income of households. Cereals account for 34 per cent of food expenditure in rural areas followed by animal products (22 per cent), but in urban areas cereals lost their pre-eminence to animal products in the early 2000s. For each year over the coming decade, demand for milk is predicted to grow 10.6 per cent, eggs to grow 7.4 per cent and meat to grow 8.4 per cent (Gandhi & Zhou, 2010).

Considering the increase in meat production and consumption in India, the question arises as to whether increased consumption is a result of traditional consumers of meat consuming more meat or whether meat is attracting new consumers in areas and communities that are traditionally vegetarian. We do not know the answer to this question. However, the works cited above suggest the emergence of the ‘consumer class’

in India and an increase in disposable income of consumers as the main drivers of increased demand for meat.

According to a report by the United States Department of Agriculture, the growth in the Indian poultry industry is driven primarily by gains in real per capita incomes and changes in poultry prices:

Industry sources in India tend to minimize the significance of religious practices as constraints on growth in poultry consumption, although there is disagreement on this issue. Some industry sources claim that the share of the population that does not eat meat due to religious practices, as opposed to economic necessity, is fairly small, perhaps as low as 10–20 percent. (Economic Research Service [USDA], 2003, p. 5)

The emergence of a large middle class and a general increase in the disposable income of households in the wake of unprecedented growth in the economy have been cited as the reasons for a number of changes taking place in India. Most work on the middle class in India has focused on the middle class as a part of the larger global middle class, defined on the basis of economic wellbeing and in opposition to the other classes (Derne, 2008; Ganguly-Scrase & Scrase, 2009). In such descriptions of the middle class, consumption assumes centrality (Fernandes, 2006; Upadhyaya, 2011).

1.8.2 The Indian middle class

While there is some early work on the middle class in India, most notably by B.B. Misra (1961) and D.P. Mukerji (1958), the Indian middle class as an area of social enquiry remained on the periphery until the economic liberalisation of India in the early 1990s. Various reasons have been cited for this, including reliance on caste as the organisational and analytical framework for the majority of Indian society; a focus on village studies, not a traditional bastion of the middle class in India; a focus on poverty and rural development; and the perceived political and social insignificance of the Indian middle class.

Starting in the mid-1990s, academics and political and social commentators began to focus more on the Indian middle class. Since 1998, when the book *The Great Indian Middle Class* (Varma, 1998) was first published, more has been written on the Indian middle class than was written during the entire preceding period. The works of Baviskar and Ray (2011), Derne (2003), Deshpande (2003), Favero (2005), Fernandes (2006), Ganguly-Scrase and Scrase (2009), Jaffrelot and Van der Veer (2008), Sridharan (2004)

and Vanaik (2002) have touched on various aspects of the Indian middle class, from sectoral composition to political inclination, and from the perception of the Indian middle class of its place in the domestic and global order to the impact of globalisation on the Indian middle class.

It is no coincidence that the proliferation of academic work on the Indian middle class has coincided with the economic liberalisation of India. To make sense of the social and economic changes in the wake of economic liberalisation, it was necessary to move beyond caste-based understandings. The middle class as both the driver of change and its greatest beneficiary fitted the role quite nicely. But how did the traditionally economically conservative middle class underpin the consumption-driven model of economic change on which the liberalised economy, with a reduced role for the state and expanded scope for market, was predicated?

Scholars and commentators, including those listed in the preceding paragraphs have conceptualised economic liberalisation as a point of rupture wherein a new middle class emerges and comes into its own. Consumption is the hallmark of this class and is often inextricably linked to its self-identification. Often a distinction is made between ‘old’⁴² and ‘new’ middle class. This binary is debatable, not least because the ‘new middle class’—the beneficiaries and drivers of economic growth—is largely derived from the ‘old middle class’, whether it be IT engineers or corporate workers (Fernandes 2006). Leaving aside conceptual problems with old and new middle class, most of the post-economic liberalisation research and scholarship has explored the *consumer identity* of the middle class as the ‘engine of growth’ of the Indian economy. Economic prosperity, especially the emergence of a large middle class, has been widely used as a lens to examine the changes taking place in India. Increased prosperity as a key determinant of food practices has replaced caste identity with consumer identity.

While economic factors are important in determining whether a person can access food and, if so, what kind of food, disposable income alone does not determine what people consider food. States such as Punjab and Haryana in northern India, which report some of the highest incidences of vegetarian populations, are among the richest in the country. Bengal and Orissa on the east coast and Goa on the west coast of India all have a high incidence of meat-eating populations, partly because of coastal location and reliance on

⁴² Traditional middle class - including professional class such as lawyers, doctors, engineers, and academics but mostly comprising public servants – marked by close association with the state.

harvesting aquatic fauna for food. However, whereas both Orissa and West Bengal are considered poor states, Goa is one of the wealthiest Indian states. Gujarat in western India has a significantly lower incidence of meat-eating population than its next-door neighbour Maharashtra, even though both states have extensive coastlines and high per capita incomes by Indian standards⁴³.

The focus of recent work then, despite various themes covered, has been on the middle class as a class that identifies itself through consumption. In anthropological theory, consumption is no doubt important to the middle-class identity. In fact, for Weber, the middle class is defined not by its position in the system of production but by its consumption (Liechty, 2003). But could economic factors alone be adequate in explaining the changes taking place in India? It is true that economic resources are needed for consumption; increased income means increased ability to consume. However, one has finite resources subject to multiple demands; that is, consumption choices are mediated by factors beyond the economic, including social, cultural, demographic, geographical, and legal just to mention a few.

1.8.3 Building on insights provided by caste and class—Mintz, Bourdieu and Practice Theory

The work of Sidney Mintz provides a useful separation between access to food (in his case, sugar) and the circumstances that influence its inclusion in everyday routines. In explaining the structure of his earlier work (i.e., Mintz, 1986), he writes:

I found it useful ... to separate broad changes in background that made access to sugar easier, on the one hand, from the circumstances of daily domestic life and work, within which consumers installed sugar in their everyday routines, on the other. (Mintz, 1996, p. 20)

There is currently limited understanding of how these other circumstances of life influence the consumption choices, including food choices, of Hindus in north India. When disposable income and consumer economy did not dominate the discourse, caste did. In such a discourse, there is little role for the agency of the individual; instead, food

⁴³ For percentage of vegetarian population by state see Achaya (1994). For more recent data see https://www.huffingtonpost.in/2016/06/14/how-india-eats_n_10434374.html.

For per capita income by states of India see <https://www.esopb.gov.in/static/PDF/GSDP/Statewise-Data/statewisedata.pdf>

practices are determined by the structural factors, be it caste or economy. Moving away from twofold categorisations, my research looks at meat consumption by examining when it is consumed or avoided, how, why, by whom and with whom. While this thesis has touched upon a number of theories, the thread of practice theory binds the narrative together.

Practice theory, as it is understood today, is derived from various sources, including philosophy (Heidegger), social theory (Bourdieu, Giddens), cultural theory (Foucault), linguistics (Wittgenstein) and theories of science and technology (Pickering). However:

despite this diversity, practice accounts are joined in the belief that such phenomena as knowledge, meaning, human activity, science, power, language, social institutions, and historical transformation occur within and are aspects or components of the field of practices. The field of practices is the total nexus of interconnected human practices. (Schatzki et al., 2001, p. 11)

One of the main achievements of practice theory is that it reconciles the duality between subject and object or the individual and the whole. Giddens, in his ‘theory of structuration’ sees society as reflected in individuals and the practices they share—society makes individuals by shaping their practices and is simultaneously made by individuals in the acts of carrying out practices as they go about their lives (1979, 1984). For Giddens then practice is the meeting point of the individual and society. Practices are shaped by society and simultaneously shape society. Tradition and routine in social life are central to social reproduction—stability - and change (Giddens, 1979, 1984). This conceptualisation of society, practices and individuals is important in that it replaces the idea of immutability and accommodates change. In this respect, it is a closer approximation of how societies actually behave and is helpful in making sense of rapidly changing societies such as India and the evolving and fast-changing field of food consumption.

While it is true that society codifies its norms and values in the field of food practices, the arena of food practices itself is constantly reconstituted in the act of carrying out practices. This is not surprising given that identity formation, including identity formation through consumption, is a reflective act that is under constant review. In this sense, food practices can act as a stabiliser of identity—reinforcing existing identities – or act as a catalyst for forging new identities. Food practices can erase social boundaries, as in the case of eating out, reinforce existing boundaries or create hitherto unknown boundaries. These, in turn, can affect food practices by giving birth to new ways of eating and

formation of groups and communities around adoption or rejection of certain food practices. The examples could include the paleo diet, organic food communities, the slow food movement, fair trade movement, citizens for the prevention of cruelty to animals, and religious sects with strong dietary prescriptions.

Looking at food practices through the lens of the pre- and post-swallowing worlds of food in a society and the feedback loop that connects them helps to operationalise Giddens' theoretical construct of 'structuration' as applied to food practices. The consumption or avoidance of meat, from a symbolic rather than nutritional perspective, permeates north Indian Hindu society. Meat has such strong symbolic meanings in the pre-swallowing world of north Indian Hindu society that any detailed examination of the practices of meat eating, and stability or change in them, has the potential to reveal far more about the deeper changes in Indian society and how this affects identity than an examination of a less symbolic theme such as car ownership. In his book *The Origin of Table Manners*, Claude Levi-Strauss (1978) notes that a society reveals its structure in the way it cooks. To this one could add what a society cooks or does not cook. If practices are what make a society, a change in practice can be seen to indicate a deeper change in both society and the construction and embodiment of social identity. In explaining the link between practices and choices about what to consume, Allen Warde (2005) observes:

consumption [is] a process whereby agents engage in appropriation and appreciation ... of goods, services, performances, information or ambience ... In this view, consumption is not itself a practice but is, rather, a moment in almost every practice. Appropriation occurs within practices: cars are worn out and petrol is burned in the process of motoring. Items appropriated and the manner of their deployment are governed by the conventions of the practice. (p. 137)

Beginning with a study of practices can provide valuable insight into the consumption choices of individuals and households and tell us a great deal about the societies in which they are located and how individuals negotiate these societies and their norms. For example, examining the commonplace activity of showering can lead to a deeper understanding of the impact of infrastructure and resource availability within a society and changing ideas of a clean body:

The story of how showering has become normal can be told in terms of innovation in plumbing, heating and power. From this point of view, the 'translation' of showering from communal bathing houses, to hydrotherapeutic clinics, to individual homes is only possible because of the construction and

availability of specific infrastructural arrangements and material resources.
(Hand et al., 2005, p. 2)

Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus (1972/1977, 1984) has been widely employed to understand, among other things, what people choose to consume and why, through exploring socialisation and how this socialisation is reflected in everyday practices.

[Habitus] is a mediating notion that evokes the common sense duality between the individual and the social ... that is, the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel, and act in determinate way. (Wacquant, 2005, p. 316)

Bourdieu (1986) sought to understand the world via a focus on social practices, as opposed to seeking explanations of behaviour via reference to codified rules. What guides action and order according to Bourdieu is habitus, which creates a 'common sense world', or a world of shared meanings. Bourdieu developed the notion of habitus to capture 'the permanent internalisation of the social order in the human body' (Eriksen & Nielsen, 2001, p.130) while recognising 'the agent's practice, his or her capacity for invention and improvisation' (Bourdieu, 1980/1990). Thus, while it would appear that the concept of habitus gives primacy to structural factors in shaping practices, a more detailed analysis suggests that the influence of structure is delicately balanced by the ability of the actor to shape the field and, in doing so, influence the structure itself.

In the area of food practice, this balance is reflected in, among other things, the conceptualisation of food practices and the body by different social classes. Food practices have been effectively used to mark the boundaries between social groups and have been an important indicator of class status. Until recently, when famines and starvation were not unheard of and regular access to sufficient food was by no means guaranteed to all, the food practices of the upper classes were marked by opulence, wastage, excessive consumption or rich food and alcohol, and their lifestyle was marked by a lack of physical activity unless for leisure. Consequently, the upper-class body was large. The body of a member of the working class, conversely, was lean—a direct result of the frugal intake of coarse food and a reliance on physical activity as a means of earning a livelihood. In more recent times, especially since the end of the Second World War, food scarcity has ceased to be a threat in many parts of the world, especially the developed world, and most now have access to high-calorie food. In this context, the upper classes have been marked by the consumption of smaller quantities of nutritionally dense food and, due to the current image of the desirable body being a lean body, greater levels of

physical activity. By contrast, the working classes have come to rely more on high-calorie, nutritionally poor food, partly because of the lower cost of such food and partly because of preferences shaped by various social factors including access to information. This, accompanied by decreased levels of physical activity in the work environments of the working classes, has resulted in larger bodies in these classes, as reflected in the obesity epidemic in western societies.

How relevant is the idea of habitus in understanding people in a world in which simultaneous cultural influences operate and change increasingly rapidly? Stadler (2006) refers to the work of Manuel Castells to suggest that space—something that exists between two things—is essentially social. Changes in the wake of globalisation, including those resulting from developments in information technology and transportation, have changed social relations and therefore the conception of space. These developments bring together practices that in the past could have only existed in physically contiguous local places.

Put simply, as a result of globalisation and developments in science and technology, practices that were otherwise temporally and geographically separated have come to co-exist. It is therefore possible to choose from multiple practices—a choice that is reflexive in the sense that it is conscious and deliberate. Writing on the continuing relevance of habitus as a conceptual tool Appadurai (1996) observes:

As group's pasts become increasingly parts of museums, exhibits, and collections ... culture becomes less what Pierre Bourdieu would have called habitus (a tacit realm of reproducible practices and dispositions) and more an arena for conscious choice, justification, and representation. (p. 44)

The concept of habitus (Bourdieu, 1972/1977) has been critical to our understanding of people's food preferences. It relies on the idea of socialisation, whereby the social is internalised by the individual and determines their preferences and choices, including in relation to food. Does the concept of habitus continue to be as relevant to our understanding of the eating practices of people today as it was when first proposed in the seventies? How can it help us to understand both current eating practices and the socialisation of identity of people in an age in which multiple media of socialisation vie with each other, and 'fads' moves in and out relentlessly?

Whilst the space between people and practices has contracted in the wake of globalisation, habitus when coupled with Bourdieu's notion of distinction remains a relevant conceptual

tool. Bourdieu's idea of 'distinction' (1984) adds to the notion of habitus and is particularly helpful in understanding food practices. Products are no longer consumed solely for their material (or, in the case of food, nutritional) value; they are increasingly consumed for their symbolic value, wherein a consumer assigns symbolic meaning to the products. In doing so, the consumer becomes both the producer and consumer of meanings and symbols. In the case of food, the consumer quite literally embodies these meanings and symbols. This condition is the 'crux' of postmodern consumption (Firat & Venkatesh, 1993, 1995; Kniazeva & Venkatesh, 2007).

For postmodern or late-modern individuals, few identities if any are ascribed. Nor are identities, once achieved, retained indefinitely or permanently. They have to be acquired and reinforced through choices and practices (Giddens, 1991). Consumption, including consumption of food, is one way to acquire and express group affiliation and reinforce identity (Layder, 1997). In the context of food, two factors exacerbate the practice and consumption flux of postmodern societies resulting in a situation in which identities are rarely, if ever, finalised (Featherstone, 1991). One of these relates to the fact that globalisation, entrepreneurship and science offer modern societies an endless variety of food products to choose from, each with its own logic and fashion. This is reflected in anxiety about food, which manifests in the desire to take and share via social media photos of one's food and the venues in which it is consumed; problems with body image and attempts to fix them through food; a proliferation of diets; clinical conditions such as anorexia, bulimia and obesity; concerns with food safety, resulting in the regulation of food; growing concern about food allergies; concerns about food supply chains; and a growing movement to take greater control of sourced food by, among other things, sourcing locally and going organic.

The second and related point is that food practices are no longer as constrained by tradition:

In contrast to the relatively settled foodways of the past, present day culture contains few enduring stories about food and eating that may securely embed the individual appetite in social structure. (Crouch & O'Neill, 2000, p. 187)

In a context in which the significance of what is consumed eclipses the habits that guide consumption, eating becomes more about self-production (Bauman, 1989): the creation of a distinct identity or distinction (Bourdieu, 1984). Any attempt to understand practices and consumption by referring to social institutions or organising principles is likely to be

less effective than one that examines practices and consumption at a social level (Archer, 1988). Further, under the influence of early work on food, there has been a tendency to understand food practices in binaries, such as raw and cooked (Levi-Strauss, 1965) and clean and unclean (Douglas, 1966); or, in the Indian context, vegetarian and non-vegetarian, pure and impure (Dumont, 1966/1970) and *kuccha* (water-based) and *pucca* (oil-based). To these could be added the economic binary of high and low disposable income.

This thesis adds to this existing literature by building upon the structures of caste and increased wealth in explaining the avoidance or eating of meat. In focusing on everyday household food practices, and the richness that this analysis brings, we can see that meat consumption and avoidance is a tool through which Hindus in north India create and re-create their complex social identities. In doing so this thesis adds additional layers of complexity to caste and class identities and practices. These identities are deeply contextual, overlapping and at times contradictory. They point to a more complex engagement between the ‘new’ and the ‘old’ as Hindus in north India make sense of their rapidly changing worlds.

CHAPTER 2: FIELD SITE DEHRADUN

I spent approximately 12 months (June 2014 to May 2015) in Dehradun to conduct fieldwork and collect data for my thesis. The history of and perspective on Dehradun in this chapter are drawn from my personal knowledge and the conversations and ‘oral history’ of people in the town,

Dehradun is a city 350 kilometres northeast of Delhi and a ‘counter magnate’⁴⁴ to the National Capital Region. Dehradun has a population of 578,420.⁴⁵ Despite its small size by Indian standards, Dehradun is characterised by a sizeable middle class and a cosmopolitan culture. This is in part because Dehradun—apart from being a cantonment town—is the seat of a number of government institutions, including the Indian Military Academy, the Oil and Natural Gas Commission and the Survey of India, the Indian Institute of Petroleum, the Indian Institute of Remote Sensing, the Forest Research Institute, the Forest Survey of India, the Wildlife Institute of India, and units of the Defence Research and Development Organisation and the Ordnance Factories Board. Dehradun is also famous for its schools, including the Doon School and the Rashtriya Indian Military College.

Dehradun made for an attractive field site for my research for a number of reasons. Most social research on India has focused either on rural areas and village communities or on metropolitan cities. Despite their growing importance, there has been little work on emerging urban centres. These second-rung cities are the new growth centres of consumption in India. They are the new markets into which corporations are tapping, even as metropolitan markets mature and level off. More particularly, the state of Uttarakhand enjoyed one of the fastest rates of economic growth in the country over the period 2000–2011, with most of this growth concentrated in Dehradun. Additionally, even though Dehradun has historically had an established cosmopolitan population dating back to the mid-nineteenth century, there is also a large local population rooted in tradition. As new ways of consuming are discovered and adopted, they co-exist with memories of old ways of doing things (Liechty, 2003). Therefore, it is a rich location in

⁴⁴ Towns and cities that are close to Delhi and, it is hoped, will attract people through creation of better living conditions and employment opportunities to relieve the population pressure on the national capital by reducing migration to it.

⁴⁵ Census India 2011.

which to trace the fissures separating these new practices and their outcomes from the old.

Once a quiet, sleepy town favoured by government training institutes, research facilities and retired bureaucrats and army officers, Dehradun has grown rapidly and haphazardly over the last 15 years or so. Rapid, unplanned expansion has been the fate of most urban settlements, big and small, in India. In the case of Dehradun, the rate of growth was accelerated by its designation in 2000 as the provisional capital of the newly created hill state of Uttarakhand. The state was subsequently renamed Uttarakhand.

2.1 Dehradun—A Brief History⁴⁶

While the state of Uttarakhand is relatively new, the area around modern Dehradun finds mention in the Indian epics of the Ramayana and Mahabharata. Dehradun is said to be the home of Guru Dronacharya⁴⁷ of the Mahabharata. The connection to the heroes of the Indian epics notwithstanding, historical events, far more recent than the Mahabharata, have shaped modern Dehradun. These are listed and briefly discussed below:

- Gurkha rule (1803–1816)
- British East India Company (1816–1857) and British India or British *Raj* (1858–1947)
- Partition of India (1947) and influx of refugees from the Punjab
- The arrival of Tibetans in Dehradun (1960s) following the flight of the fourteenth Dalai Lama from Tibet in 1959
- The Sikh militancy in Punjab (1980s and early 1990s) and migration of Hindus from Punjab to Dehradun
- Economic liberalisation (1991) and formation of the hill state of Uttarakhand (2000)
- Increased frequency and intensity of natural disasters in the hill districts of Uttarakhand, especially after the flash floods of 2013, leading to migration from the hills of Garhwal region of the state.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ This chapter draws on information derived from conversation with the staff of Doon Library and Research Centre, Dehradun. For a revised overview of the history of Dehradun see Williams (1874/2010).

⁴⁷ The teacher of Kauravas and Pandavas, the feuding cousins of Mahabharata

⁴⁸ The last two are ongoing and continue to impact the city of Dehradun.

2.1.1 Early settlement and Gurkha [Nepalese] rule

The word Dehradun is derived from the words *dera* (camp) and *doon* (valley). In 1676, Guru Ram Rai, the eldest son of the seventh Sikh Guru established his *dera* or camp in this valley between the Shiwaliks (Himalayan foothills) and the lesser Himalayas (the Himalayan range between 1500 and 3000 metres in altitude). Despite this early settlement, the Sikh connection to the area was tenuous and the valley remained part of the Hindu Kingdom of Garhwal. The population of the valley was almost exclusively Hindu, derived from both the Garhwal hills and the plains bordering them.

The Gurkhas, having united under Prithvi Narain Shah and emerging as the paramount power in Nepal, started to push southwards and westwards, first invading Garhwal in 1791. They turned back only when the king of Garhwal agreed to pay an annual tribute of Rs. 25,000. However, this purchased peace did not last long: the Gurkhas invaded again in 1803. The king of Garhwal, Pradyuman Sah, was eventually killed in battle and the Gurkhas annexed Dehradun in October 1803. The Gurkhas, who were also Hindus, started to settle in the valley; but the Gurkha rule was short lived.

2.1.2 British East India Company

Around the same time as the Gurkhas were pushing south towards what is today north India, the political scene in India was changing rapidly. Of the various European trading companies that established their trading houses in India in the days of the Great Mughals, two were involved in a life and death struggle to gain control of the rich Indian trade: the British East India Company and the French East India Company. In what was a common colonial tactic, the expression of this struggle was often through proxy conflicts in which the British and French would side with opposite warring factions in the political tumult of the Indian princely states. However, in the case of Bengal, the British East India Company came into *direct* conflict with the Nawab of Bengal—a Nawab being a title bestowed upon a semi-autonomous Muslim ruler of a princely state during the Mughal period.

This conflict ended with a decisive British victory over the Nawab of Bengal in the battle of Plassey in 1757. Following the battle of Plassey, the British installed a puppet Nawab on the throne of Bengal, effectively becoming the rulers of the state. Plassey was only the beginning of the British imperial adventure in India. The British East India Company

fought a number of wars in quick succession after the famous victory at Plassey and brought large swathes of India under their direct control and rule.

The north-northwest expanding British East India Company soon reached what is today the international border between Nepal and India. This brought the two expanding political powers into contact and conflict along what is today the border between Nepal and the Indian states of Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh. Repeated skirmishes with the British border police led to the Anglo-Nepalese war of 1814–1816, which ended with the Treaty of Sugauli and transfer of large tracts of Gurkha-controlled areas—including Dehradun and the hills of Mussoorie—to the British East India Company.

Those unfamiliar with the history of British India and its relationship with the British East India Company may be interested to note that in 1858, following what is referred to as either the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 or the First War of Independence, rule by the British East India Company ceased, and the Indian subcontinent was directly ruled by the British Crown. The British dissolved the East India Company in 1874, and Queen Victoria was proclaimed the Empress of India in 1876. This direct British rule continued until 1947.

2.1.3 Strategic importance to British India

Dehradun's proximity to the Punjab made it militarily important to the British. The British wanted to annex the Punjab to secure its Indian possessions from any invasion from the northwest and to bring Afghanistan into the British sphere of influence to counter any threat from Tsarist Russia. The British East India Company annexed the Punjab in 1849 and incorporated it into British India.

Mussoorie, a location about 35 kilometres from Dehradun and at an altitude of just over 2000 metres, became a favoured hill station, and Dehradun an important cantonment town. Dehradun became home to various military- and defence-related institutes. A European community grew in and around Dehradun in places such as Jolly Grant, Herbert Pur and Clement Town. Proximity to Mussoorie, the arrival of railways, moderate climate, fertile soil, a relatively small native population, and its location in a beautiful valley in the foothills of the Himalayas made Dehradun and surrounding areas attractive to Europeans.

Dehradun acquired a reputation as a beautiful, laidback town. Much of the development took place along Rajpur Road, once the main road of the town, which runs from *Ghanta Ghar* (Clock Tower) near the railway station to the village of Rajpur, from where the

climb to Mussoorie starts. Dehradun's European population attained its largest numbers just before and during the Second World War, during which the Dehra Dun Central Internment Camp was a major prison camp for detained German, Austrian and Italian citizens who were living in the British colonies. One of those interned was Austrian mountaineer Heinrich Harrer⁴⁹, who eventually escaped over the mountains to Tibet. Dehradun was also a rest and recreation destination for allied troops, a recuperation centre for the convalescing, and a major defence and strategic planning centre. The Europeans brought with them colonial bungalows, lawns and gardens, high street culture, cafes and clubs, bakeries and restaurants, and alcohol and parties.

Soon well-off Indians from surrounding areas, as well as from places further away, started buying properties in Dehradun. When the Europeans left at the end of the Second World War and after India's independence in 1947, Indian civil servants and defence personnel in ever-larger numbers started to make Dehradun home.

2.1.4 The Dehradun of independent India—Marked by migration

The 1947 partition of British India into the independent states of India and Pakistan displaced over 15 million people and was the backdrop for the deaths of between one and two million people. It was the largest transfer of population in the world's history as the Hindu and Sikh populations from what is currently Pakistan and Bangladesh⁵⁰ migrated to India, and Muslim populations from India moved to Pakistan and Bangladesh.⁵¹ The area known as the Punjab in British India, which was home to the majority of the Sikh population in the subcontinent, was divided into Pakistani and Indian Punjab. Many displaced Hindus and Sikhs from Pakistan came to Dehradun and were settled in, among other localities, Prem Nagar on Chakrata Road and Race Course Road behind the railway station, areas that would have been outside the town proper in 1947, but which now are very much part of Dehradun.

⁴⁹ Harrer's escape from the internment camp, his journey to Tibet and time he spent there became the subject of the movie 'Seven Years in Tibet'.

⁵⁰ In 1947, what is now Bangladesh was part of Pakistan and was referred to as East Pakistan. East Pakistan became the independent state of Bangladesh following the 1971 Bangladesh war (also known as the Indo-Pakistani War).

⁵¹ While very few Hindus and Sikhs remained in Pakistan, a sizable Muslim population remained in India. The current Muslim population in India is estimated as 172 million people (Census India 2011), noting that the population of Pakistan itself is 193 million people.

Following the fourteenth Dalai Lama's escape from Chinese occupied Tibet to India in 1956, over 100,000 Tibetan refugees have followed him to settle in India. According to current estimates, up to 130,000 ethnic Tibetans live in India today, and India is home to the Tibetan Government in Exile in Dharamsala, Himachal Pradesh. Settlements were established around India to provide homes for these refugees, including in areas around Dehradun, such as Clement Town and Rajpur Village.

The Punjabi influx of 1947–1948 was repeated on a smaller scale in the 1980s and early 1990s following the social turmoil and deteriorating security situation in (Indian) Punjab as militant Sikhs demanded an independent sikh state, which they called Khalistan. The Indian government countered this independence movement, culminating in 'Operation Blue Star' and the subsequent assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her two Sikh bodyguards, and widespread communal violence. During this conflict period, Hindus and some Sikhs left the state of Punjab and moved to other areas, including Dehradun.

The arrival of people from the Punjab and Tibet added to and changed the demographics of Dehradun. Today, both previously displaced communities are well integrated and highly successful, especially in business. Culturally, Tibetan temples, monasteries and institutes, including a Tibetan hospital and school, are well-known landmarks of Dehradun. Tibetan and Punjabi restaurants are a common sight too.

While this migration influenced the social and cultural milieu of the city, it did not radically alter the city itself in terms of its laidback character and intellectual nature as a home to prestigious sites of learning. Indeed, although various stages in the history of Dehradun changed the city in small and incremental ways—perhaps even laying the foundation for the next major changes—two developments in particular altered the city beyond recognition: the process of Indian economic liberalisation, initiated in 1991; and the creation in 2000 of the hill state of Uttaranchal, later renamed Uttarakhand, and the designation of the city of Dehradun as the provisional capital of this newly formed state.

2.1.5 Economic liberalisation and the formation of a new state⁵²

In 1991, India embarked on a process of economic liberalisation and reform as part of the larger structural reform agenda being pushed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. In brief, this economic liberalisation and reform included diluting the socialist model of state intervention and economic planning, integrating the Indian economy with the global economy by lowering tariff and non-tariff barriers on the movement of goods and services, allowing greater movement of foreign capital and investment in and out of the country, and rolling back the state to give a greater role to the market in shaping the economic functioning of the country. This easing of the movement of capital and resulting greater access to finance led to speculative investment, which particularly affected the stock market and the real estate market. These two markets soared following economic liberalisation.

In Dehradun, these changes were magnified by another significant political development. In 2000, conceding to the longstanding demand of the people of the hill districts of the state of Uttar Pradesh for a separate hill state, the Indian Parliament created the state of Uttaranchal (later renamed Uttarakhand). The new state needed a capital, and while the state had been formed to bring governance closer to the people of the remote hill districts, the foothill town of Dehradun was chosen as the *provisional* state capital, and remains so 20 years later.

Dehradun had a lot to offer, but in 2000 it was incapable of meeting the surge in demand for housing/accommodation. Politicians and bureaucrats needed offices and residences, so the newly formed government began commandeering old buildings, renting private properties and giving out contracts for new buildings and complexes. Suddenly, the long-stagnant property market of Dehradun was heating up. Once this phenomenon took root, it fed on itself, creating a cycle of demand, increasing prices and speculative investment, leading to more demand and further price rises. Dehradun, once small and contained, expanded in all directions.

Whereas state formation triggered the property boom and expansion of the city and its economy, other developments also contributed. Realising that there was an unmet

⁵² For more information on the formation and economic structure of the state of Uttarakhand see: Chaturvedi, M and S. Mohanty (2010). “Uttarakhand Diagnostic Study of Building a Mountain State 2000-2010”. GTZ and Doon University, Dehradun.

demand for vocational and professional courses in north India and hoping to capitalise on Dehradun's reputation as a centre of education, many entrepreneurs opened institutes and academies in the city. In this they were assisted by the newly formed state's policies of giving subsidised land and tax concessions to businesses. Today Dehradun has at least seven recognised universities and many more vocational and professional colleges, which attract students from all over the country.

The provision of higher education was until recently a preserve of the state, but private educational, professional and vocational institutions are increasingly common. These institutions may not compare with the established state universities and colleges, but unlike to the latter, admission to these institutes is relatively easy if one has money to meet the expenses. Educational institutes have influenced the demographic profile and culture of Dehradun, making it youthful and culturally fluid. Students can be seen everywhere, identifiable by the uniforms of their respective institutes. An entire economy has emerged to cater to their needs.

To boost the economic growth of this newly formed state, the Indian government designated Uttarakhand a Special Category State. This status brings many benefits, including tax holidays and excise rebates for industry. This policy was intended to promote the industrial development of the state, including in its remote and hilly parts. However, with its focus on profit maximisation, industry was loath to locate in the hills where there was a dearth of infrastructure and where the costs of manufacturing and transportation were higher. Instead, most development was located in the more accessible parts of the state, including in and around Dehradun. This rapid industrial growth created employment opportunities and encouraged people to move to Dehradun, further accelerating the growth of the economy by increasing demand for goods and services. A booming economy, in turn, attracted unskilled and semi-skilled workers from the poorer parts of India, especially eastern Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Bengal.

Finally, there has been unprecedented migration into Dehradun from the hills, and to a lesser extent from the surrounding plains. The migration from the hills has been driven by a desire to have a foothold in the capital; provide better education for children; have better access to health facilities and jobs; and, since the major floods of 2013, escape increasingly more frequent and more intense natural disasters. The migration from the plains is aspirational for the working class, but for the middle and upper classes it is

largely driven by a desire to access better education and escape insecurity, crime and poor governance in the neighbouring state of Uttar Pradesh.

2.2 Dehradun of Today

The combined result of these intertwined developments is rapid economic growth and an increase in disposable income. In 2010, there were hardly any traffic lights in Dehradun; today, it is difficult to manage traffic without them. Flyovers are under construction and multi-storeyed parking lots are not far behind. In 2010, there was not one shopping mall in Dehradun. By 2015 there are at least six, and stores such as Kumars, Easy Day and Suvidha had changed themselves to resemble supermarkets.

In 2010, fine dining would have meant south Indian cuisine at Sagar Ratna (later closed) or a meal at Kumar Vegetarian, Moti Mahal or Sher-e-Punjab. Kwaliti was an institution, popular with both tourists and locals; and the Tibetan restaurant, Orchard, while famous, operated out of an old house, worlds apart from its slick operation today with air-conditioning and refrigerated display cabinets for cakes. New bakeries, designer cafes and boutique restaurants have also opened to tap into increased affluence, an expanding market, changing tastes and changing attitudes towards consumption.

At the same time, Dehradun has lost its charm as a ‘quiet, sleepy town’. Whilst this description may seem overly romantic and clichéd, and no longer accurately describes the town, it is for residents and visitors alike, way of romanticising the past. Contemporary works on the town romanticise the past while painting a grim picture of the present. Indeed this longing for a quiet, green Dehradun of the past when litchi, mango and papaya orchards dotted the landscape, when rains were plentiful, the summers less harsh and winters more benign, when fruits tasted sweeter and the aroma of basmati rice imbued the air is a common refrain in Dehradun and vividly captured in *A Town Called Dehra* (2008) and *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra* (2011), two of the more recent works by Ruskin Bond. Romancing the past—lived and imagined—is an integral part of the discourse on the city. Today the streets of Dehradun are crowded and noisy and the air is polluted. Smog, unheard of until a few years ago, is common in winter now. Despite expansion, there is also a large unmet demand for housing, leading to massive increases in property prices and rents.

While the old residents of Dehradun may fondly remember the ‘good old days’, in reality most have benefitted from the changes that have taken place in the last few years. As Dr Mehta remarked:

When I bought this block of land in 1987, it cost me one lakh [one hundred thousand] rupees. One of the reasons I bought in Dehradun was because I could not afford to buy land in cities like Delhi or Lucknow. In 2000, a block like mine could fetch anywhere between one and a half to two lakhs. Today, it is worth two crore rupees [20 million rupees]. I have not had much success in real estate but this is one good investment I made.

Dr Mehta lives in Sushant Lok, the middle-class neighbourhood where I conducted the fieldwork for this research. The land in Sushant Lok is owned and managed by a housing society that was registered in the 1960s. Under its charter, the housing society is to develop land and parcel out plots to be leased to members, so they can build residential houses. The housing society also has the responsibility to manage the day-to-day running of the neighbourhood.

When the housing society was formed, one of the prerequisites for joining it was that the applicant should be a serving or retired ‘Class I’ officer of a government department. Class I officers include commissioned officers of the armed forces, members of the Indian Civil Service and the Indian Forest Service, and senior members of the Provincial Civil Service. Later, officers of the merchant marines also became eligible to join the housing society. This requirement meant that only a small fraction of the population, namely a section of those from the educated middle class, could join the housing society.

While not specifically by design, the location of Sushant Lok further excluded people: only those serving in the state cadre⁵³ of Uttar Pradesh (the state in which Dehradun was located until 2000) or those serving in other state cadres but *from* the area were likely to join the housing society. In practice this meant that most members were high-caste Hindus from the mountains serving in the civil services and armed forces. This imparted the housing society with a high degree of social homogeneity, architectural uniformity and social cohesion, reflected in its hitherto smooth functioning.

⁵³ Civil servants are assigned to different states and are said to belong to the cadre of the state to which they have been assigned, regardless of where they live or work.

When the housing society was formed and registered, most members were serving government officials. As infrastructure development is largely a state responsibility, the influence of members in government departments meant that basic infrastructure facilities such as roads, electricity, telephone and water were put in place early on. However, the construction of houses, a matter of private initiative and investment, started much later, so that even in the late 1980s most of the residential plots were vacant.

Up to the 1990s, it was a common practice among government officials to buy plots of residential land early in their careers but not to build a house until towards the end of their service, and then often with the financial benefits accruing from retirement. This was because government jobs were transferable and accommodation was provided, and the rental market was either non-existent or not remunerative enough to encourage people to be landlords. Further, limited access to finance and the general tendency at the time to avoid loans, which were considered socially undesirable, burdensome and risky, meant that government officers built houses just before or just after retirement.

When these retiring officers built their houses in Sushant Lok, they generally built large houses with annexes and outhouses⁵⁴. This was because they were used to living in large bungalow-style government houses and because the plots in Sushant Lok were quite large.⁵⁵ However, by the time these houses were built, children had often already grown up and moved out, and were living and working in other cities or countries.

At this time, there was no demand for rental properties, and thus little incentive to rent out portions of these houses. House owners may even have been disinclined to keep tenants for rent, as their peers might not have viewed such practices favourably. However, most residents gave their outhouses (often a garage or storage area) to families working as domestic help in their houses. Under this arrangement, the husband would often have a day job but would also run errands for the landlord and work as caretaker of the property, while the wife would work as domestic help and cook, often for no payment or a nominal payment. This practice would have had social acceptance, as domestic help working for government officials in India often lived in small dwellings or outhouses in the same compound as the government bungalows.

⁵⁴ In India outhouses refer to a smaller building on the same plot as the main building, usually used as additional storage space.

⁵⁵ Most plots in Sushant Lok are either 900 square meters or 1400 square meters.

While keeping caretakers and their families in outhouses remains a common practice in Sushant Lok, the use of properties has changed. A number of houses have been let out to private individuals and government departments. Many others have had sections added, such as a second floor above a garage, with the purpose of keeping tenants. In some cases, tenants rent and live in an existing house.

This has happened for a number of reasons. A booming real estate market and the prospects of quick capital gains made speculative investment more attractive so that there are now many houses where the landlord lives in another city or another house in Dehradun but has a house in Sushant Lok with an eye on future gains. In other cases, the original resident has passed away and the children, who inherited the house, do not live in Dehradun and may not want to retain the property that they have inherited. In such cases, the property is either rented out or sold to an eligible buyer or sometimes, although rarely, to an ineligible buyer who then buys the property in the name of someone who is technically eligible to buy the property as per the rules of the housing society. Whether this change is owing to the lucrative property market or the sudden demand for rental properties and the attractive rental income such demand offers, the reason for change can be traced back to economic liberalisation and the designation of Dehradun as the provisional state capital of Uttarakhand. These two factors together created significant demand for real estate, both to buy and rent.

2.3 Data Collection—Field Site (Sushant Lok) and the Selection of Households

2.3.1 Field site—Sushant Lok

Sushant Lok was not immune to the developments that affected India generally in the case of liberalisation and Dehradun specifically in the case of the formation of Uttarakhand. The housing society is no longer as homogeneous as in its early days. Today, there are three broad categories of residents: residents who are also landlords, tenants, and caretakers and their families. There are at least three categories of landlord residents:

1. Original residents, now quite old and living in houses they built themselves
2. Residents who inherited the properties they occupy, which have often been renovated or rebuilt

3. Residents who bought land or a house through the resale of property, and who have either built from scratch or considerably renovated the original house.

Similarly, there are many categories of tenants and caretakers, such as:

1. Tenants that are institutions, such as non-government organisations (NGOs)
2. Private tenants occupying entire houses
3. Private tenants occupying a part of a house
4. Single tenants
5. Tenant households
6. Many single tenants sharing a house—typically male students or young workers
7. Caretakers and domestic help living alone
8. Caretakers and domestic help living with their families.

The purpose of listing these differences in residents—a list not exhaustive by any means—is to underline the gradual dilution in the socio-economic and demographic homogeneity of the residents of the housing society over the years. Today, there is a wide variety of houses, differing in size and architectural design, and in the caste, regional affiliations and occupations of their residents. This diversity has resulted in multiple social practices, a variety of demands for goods and services, and a variety of sources to cater to these demands.

Today Sushant Lok housing society has over 500 houses spread over Phase I and II. The older houses are relatively large, single-storey or double-storey buildings behind low boundary walls, normally with a lawn in the front and a kitchen garden and garage at the back. Most houses also have a driveway and a few fruit trees, the most common being mango, litchi, papaya and guava. The older houses are brick and cement structures, comfortable but modest. A typical house has an outdoor seating area (veranda) that leads to the drawing room. The drawing room leads to a hall or a lobby, around which are located the bedrooms and kitchen. The hall also has an exit door leading to the driveway.

The new construction cannot be described as modest in design or layout. The lawn and the vegetable garden have shrunk and the house looms over everything else. These houses are almost invariably double-storey buildings. In fact, one can, fairly accurately, tell the age of a house by looking at the height of the boundary wall and the size of the lawn: the higher the boundary wall and the smaller the lawn, the more recent the construction.

Many of the new houses are said to be ‘actually’ owned by people who are not members of the housing cooperative, as they do not meet the membership criteria of the society. The old residents feel that these people ought not to be there: ‘These people are not even serving or retired government officials let alone gazetted Class I government officials’, sighs Lal Chacha’s mother. Many bona fide residents claim that, in such cases, land is bought in the name of an eligible Class I official who remains the owner on paper, while the real owners, the otherwise-ineligible investing family, control the property through various legal instruments, such as powers of attorney. Most old residents are elderly people whose children are either overseas or in cities such as Delhi and Bangalore. Few of these children have intentions of returning to Dehradun anytime soon, if at all. When parents pass away or cannot continue to live independently because of old age, the houses are either rented out or sold. When they are put on the market to be sold, public servants often cannot buy them because the market price is beyond their legitimate means. ‘Ineligible outsiders’ then buy these houses by using the described loophole in the system.

New owners are not the only ones to have opted for larger houses. As mentioned above, many old residents added large extensions to their once modest houses; that is, additional wings to the main house to capitalise on the boom in the rental market. Today a typical house, if not rented out in its entirety, will have the elderly landlord and his wife in the main house, a tenant in the newly built additional wing, and a working class man with wife and children (in most cases) in the outhouse, typically a garage.

2.3.1.1 Sushant Lok—The location and surrounding areas

Sushant Lok is near the Forest Research Institute and the Indian Military Academy. It is about five kilometres from *Ghanta Ghar* (Clock Tower), the central landmark of old Dehradun. The road that connects the railway station of Dehradun with Chakrata Road also runs through Sushant Lok. A tea estate, now a vast but abandoned open space covered with scraggy tea bushes and the occasional tree, marks one of its boundaries. Sushant Lok Marg, the main road of Sushant Lok, branches off Chakrata Road and runs north-east to south-west, cutting across the road to the railway station and eventually terminating in a T-junction at the temple on the edge of the tea estate. About a kilometre and a half long, this road is wide, flanked by footpaths on both sides (a rarity) and sporadically dotted by trees including eucalyptus and silk cotton. It also boasts some of the best and largest blocks and houses in the colony. Located across Chakrata Road is the Forest Research Institute and its large tracts of forest. Rudragaon and Rishiwadi, once

villages but now urban and a part of the town proper, mark the north-western boundary of Sushant Lok, while new residential neighbourhoods mark the south–south eastern limits of Sushant Lok.

When it was formed, Sushant Lok was considered well beyond the city limits and therefore remote and isolated from the city proper. In those days, when very few people owned cars or scooters and public transport was poorly developed, a distance of five kilometres from town centre felt excessive. Given that there was no market close by, meeting everyday needs was a challenge. The early residents would have done their weekly shopping in the main market on Rajpur Road and everyday shopping at the stores in Rajendra Nagar, a residential neighbourhood closer to Sushant Lok. Today, the rapid expansion of the city has resulted in the growth of residential areas around and beyond Sushant Lok, and markets and shopping areas have rapidly developed in response to this urban growth.

2.3.1.2 Purchasing household supplies in Sushant Lok

There is a small shopping complex in Sushant Lok next to the housing society office. It has a teashop, grocery store, medical store, greengrocer, barbershop and tailor. There is a temple next to the shopping complex, which is managed by the housing society. While this market has a few shops, they are not adequately stocked to meet the everyday needs of the residents. Most residents go to Pretty Market at the boundary of Sushant Lok and Rudragaon and Ram Market on the railway road for everyday shopping. Both these markets are within a kilometre of Sushant Lok. There are also shops at Ballupur and on GMS Road a bit further from Sushant Lok. Finally, there is a small market opposite the Indian Military Academy on Chakrata Road. This market, which probably developed to cater to the needs of the residents of the Indian Military Academy and Forest Research Institute, has some stores that stock western food products. Residents of Sushant Lok go to this market when they want to buy cheese, pasta, western sauces and frozen processed meats.

Pretty Market has three grocery stores, two tailors, a meat store, a dairy outlet, a hardware store and a barbershop. None of the grocery stores sell meat products, although frozen products such as ice cream and frozen vegetables and vegetarian snacks are available in two of the three stores. The grocery stores also stock refrigerated items such as milk, yogurt and cold drinks. All of them offer some kind of home delivery. A few shops in Pretty Market remain in the style of the ‘old Indian grocery store’, where a wooden

counter at the entrance of the shop, staffed by the shopkeeper, prevents customers entering the store. Instead, the customer tells the shopkeeper what he or she wants and in what quantity, and the shopkeeper's assistant fills the order and returns to the counter with the products. However, most of the shops in Pretty Market have been recently renovated and modelled along the lines of open-access supermarkets, where customers can walk through the aisles, examine and choose products, and pay at the counter.

Pretty Market also has a snack bar; that is, a counter outside a room with a stove, and seating both inside the room and on the footpath in front. It sells *chowmin* (boiled noodles with cabbage and carrot, stir fried in soya sauce, vinegar and chilli sauce), *momos* (Tibetan dumplings with meat or vegetable filling), spring rolls and soup. The snack bar is popular, especially in late afternoons and evenings, with students and young people forming the largest group of patrons.

While the grocery stores are also busy in the evenings, the real excitement is around the vegetable and fruit stalls. Fruit and vegetable vendors start to converge on Pretty Market from four in the evening in the winter and five in the evening in the summer months. They display their wares on mats on the ground and on pushcarts. Only local seasonal fruits and vegetables are sold, although some stalls have also started to sell button mushroom, baby corn and broccoli. The prices here are lower than anywhere else in the surrounding area, but the fruits and vegetables are not graded or sorted; one needs time and skill to shop well. Most shoppers are women from nearby areas, old men from Sushant Lok back from their evening walk, and domestic help from Sushant Lok. Women from Sushant Lok—other than domestic help—are rarely seen buying fruits and vegetables in Pretty Market.

Ram Market on the railway road lies less than a kilometre from Pretty Market. It too has a snack shop selling similar items to the snack bar in Pretty Market—*chowmin*, *momos* and spring rolls—but it is strictly vegetarian, and it only opens in the evenings. Here too students and young people are the most frequent visitors. Likewise, students and young people are the largest group buying from the various pushcarts selling similar fare on the roadside around Ram Market. There is also another eatery, which sells traditional Indian food items such as *roti* (unleavened bread), *parantha* (fried unleavened bread), lentils, curried vegetables and rice. It is popular for breakfast, lunch and dinner. The afternoon is the busiest time of the day for this eatery, with local shopkeepers, workers in the market and passers-by stopping for lunch. Three other shops in Ram Market are also very

popular: Bisht Dairy, which started as a dairy but now functions as a provision store and sweets shop; a meat shop, the most popular in the area, which sells chicken and mutton (goat's meat); and a fruit and vegetable seller, right outside Bisht Dairy.

Diagonally across and some distance down the road are three or four makeshift fruit and vegetable stalls, competitors of the Ram Market vegetable seller. They are strategically located to intercept the traffic going to and coming from Sushant Lok. These stalls are the preferred source of fruits and vegetables for the better off living in the area. They stock local produce as well as imported fruits, such as guavas from Thailand, pears from Australia, and oranges and apples from the United States. They also sell button mushroom, zucchini, baby corn, broccoli and other exotic vegetables.

Directly across the road from these fruit and vegetable stalls is a recently opened supermarket called Suvidha (literally translated as 'convenience'). It sells frozen items such as frozen vegetable and meat snacks, as well as groceries, crockery, cleaning products, utensils and other household products. Designed like a western supermarket, it is considerably larger than a traditional grocery store. There is a wider range of products and brands to choose from, small baskets and trollies to carry shopping in, checkout counters, air-conditioning, and membership and loyalty schemes. However, it does not have a deli or a fresh food and fresh meat section. While Suvidha attracts all classes of customer, it is more popular with the middle class. Indeed, department stores or supermarkets as a concept are designed with the middle class in mind. Here, the products have to be purchased in larger quantities than at a traditional grocery store (where the customer has greater flexibility in deciding on quantity; for example, one could buy 100 grams of lentils and 200 grams of rice) and they can also be slightly more expensive than at a traditional store, even after a discount. Larger quantities also mean that some kind of transportation is needed to carry the goods home, which working-class customers may not have.

Walking further down the railway road, one reaches Anurag chowk. There used to be a large nursery here but a part of it has been sold to build apartment blocks. There is a small market comprising rows of various kinds of shops, including a hardware store, a clothing shop, a tailor, an ATM, a sweets and snacks shop, and a bank. At Anurag chowk, a road branches off the railway road and goes into the Indo-Tibetan Border Police camp. There are cafes and ice-cream parlours on this road. There is also a large gym and a popular takeaway/home delivery shop called 'Tawa and Tandoor', which operates from the

roadside and comprises a bench, a counter and an oven under a retractable awning. About 500 metres from Tawa and Tandoor, a cluster of shops appeared around 2010 in response to the residential development in the newer areas. In the last three years, a much larger market has formed around this nucleus, comprising eateries catering to students and the transient population. Behind this market there is now a shopping mall.

Most of the shops in this mall are not in use, but a few do good business. These include two cafes, a trampoline (which can be rented for a quarter of an hour or longer), Domino's Pizza (and Pizza Hut alongside, although not in the same building), a foreign liquor store, a multi-cuisine restaurant with a bar, and a multiplex. Although young men and women can be seen sitting in the mall or outside in the afternoons, it is the evening that is busiest. Young men and women, mostly students from nearby colleges and vocational training centres, and young parents with children are the most frequent visitors to this mall.

2.3.1.3 Daily life in Sushant Lok

The residents of Sushant Lok rise early. Perhaps they are woken by the call to prayer from the mosques on the other side of the tea estate and competing sounds of prayer emanating from the Gurudwara and temples nearby. Regardless, they are in the streets at dawn. The residents of Sushant Lok are intrepid walkers. Both men and women, young and old, big and small can be seen walking from 5:00 am in the morning. The numbers may go down in winter and the start time may move to a later hour, but morning walkers do not disappear. People walk in groups of two or three or more. Single walkers often have dogs with them. Most women walk in *salwar kameez* (loose tunic and trousers for women), although the young are in jeans or trousers, tracksuits and, occasionally, lycra. Men wear trousers and shirts, polo shirts and shorts, and tracksuits. The walkers are predominantly middle-class house owners or their family members, although people from nearby neighbourhoods, who do not have access to open spaces, may also be seen walking in Sushant Lok.

The serious walkers go to the Forest Research Institute or the tea estate, while others walk around Sushant Lok, most using the pavement along Sushant Lok Marg from the temple on the edge of the defunct tea estate to Chakrata Road. The numbers start to dwindle around 7:30 am, when milkmen start to make their rounds on bicycles, scooters, motorbikes and tempo (a small three-wheeled truck). Around the same time, walkers are replaced on the roads by school-going children, college students and factory workers.

They travel to work and schools or colleges on foot and by bicycles, two-wheelers, tempo and buses or mini buses.

Sushant Lok has three schools run by a charitable trust. These schools are mostly attended by children from the working classes and of those living in the outhouses of Sushant Lok.⁵⁶ Going to and coming back from school, they create a stir on the roads of Sushant Lok, much to the chagrin of many of the residents of the neighbourhood. The students of colleges and institutes can be recognised by their uniforms, shirts and trousers in the shades of grey, blue and black for both male and female students.

Between 9:30 am and 10:00 am, there is incoming flow to offices located in Sushant Lok, but this is small in volume and barely noticeable. An office can be recognised by the presence of a security guard and a huddle of people (mostly staff) standing in front aimlessly or chatting away their time. The elderly and retired male residents of Sushant Lok step out around 11:00 am to run errands, such as to pay bills (electricity, telephone and water), book gas cylinders, visit the post office or bank, and make small purchases. They are back home by 1:00 pm, in time for lunch and a siesta. Meanwhile, the roads of Sushant Lok erupt into another round of chaos and cacophony, as ‘unruly herds’ of students make their way home around 2:00 pm. They walk in the middle of the road, moving aside only grudgingly to give way to traffic when goaded by repeated use of the horn, chasing away stray dogs and cattle, hurling stones, and plucking leaves and flowers from trees and hedges.

Then suddenly it becomes quiet again and remains that way until 4:00 pm (in winter) or 5:00 pm (in summer), depending on the time of the year. At this point, women walkers from the outhouses and surrounding areas start to appear in small groups on the roads. They start and end their walk before other groups, as they have to do their grocery shopping on their way back home and prepare the evening meal. There is also the traffic of people returning home from work and college. Next to emerge are the elderly men of Sushant Lok, some accompanied by their dogs. Boys and girls from the outhouses and domestic help follow soon after. Domestic helpers are also out, either shopping or walking dogs. They may stop and chat with friends and acquaintances, but that is not the purpose of the outing. The boys and girls from the outhouses walk in groups: the girls with purpose and the boys aimlessly or menacingly, depending on the view one takes.

⁵⁶ Many believe that an important reason that people are keen to live in the outhouses of Sushant Lok is because of easy access to these schools.

Some have dogs on leads; however, unlike the dogs of the residents, these dogs are mongrels, most probably from the litter of a stray dog living in the neighbourhood. They are malnourished and on a chain or piece of rope, but have an English name and the commands issued to them are, to the extent possible, in English. By contrast, the dogs kept by home-owning residents commonly include pedigreed dogs such as Pomeranians, German Shepherds and Labradors, although Beagles, Pekingese, Saint Bernard's and Rottweilers can also be seen. Rottweilers seem to be emerging as the dog of choice for some residents and are perhaps the most common of the new breeds.

The roads start to become quiet by 7:00 pm. Groups of boys and young men can be seen huddled together under street lamps, but others who had shared the streets with them until recently have made their exit. The young men soon leave and by 8:00 pm the streets are mostly deserted. In the houses, dinner is being prepared and the residents of Sushant Lok are enjoying their evening at home.

2.3.2 Selection of households

Most of the data were collected from Sushant Lok and adjoining areas over a one-year period. Some key informant interviews were conducted around the city and data were collected from various parts of the city via participant observations over a number of days; however, all participant households in the study were located in Sushant Lok. This was done purposefully to ensure regular and easy access to the participant households as well as a geographically bound community. The households were selected with the help of people known to me who worked in a local NGO. Given that my research needed continuous and ongoing engagement with participant households and access to their homes and kitchens as well as their lives outside the house, it placed considerable demands on the time of the members of the participant households and invaded their privacy. As such, I needed introductions to recruit reliable participant households.

The data were collected from 11 participant households and their members. Visiting friends and relatives of these households were also occasionally interviewed. This was partly because of the difficulties in defining a household. What is a household and who are its members? Is it only those relatives living together permanently or on a long-term basis? What about an unmarried son who spends a few days every week away from home; is he included in the household or not? To address these and other similar issues and also to gain richer insights into the social relations and criteria used by the participants to define themselves, a household—within reasonable limits—was self-defined by the head

and other members of the household. By ‘within reasonable limits’ I mean within acceptable Indian ideas of a household. For example, a close neighbour is often said to be a ‘member of one’s household’ even though he or she is not a blood relative. In this case, such a person is not a member of the household and knows this, but also understands that it is a way of according importance and demonstrating proximity.

2.3.2.1 The characteristics of households

The 11 households were similar in some respects but quite diverse in others. These households were all upper-caste Hindu households, although one household followed Jainism. They were all educated middle-class households from north India.⁵⁷ While originally from rural areas, these households had lived in urban areas for two generations or more. This is where the similarities ended.

Only four of the 11 households lived in houses owned by them. The remaining seven were renting. With one exception, the owners were older and the tenants younger. The ages of the adult members of the participant households ranged from 25 years to 84 years, with most being 35 years of age or more. Four households had young children, while three households had grown up children living away but visiting regularly. One household also had one 50-year-old unmarried son living with his parents for most of the week; he worked in a nearby town, where he stayed for a few nights each week. Five of the participant households were from Delhi and Uttar Pradesh—all but one of these households was renting. The remaining six households were from the hills of Uttarakhand—of these only three were renting.

Only three households were single-member households for the most part, where the main member, the participant, was unmarried and living alone. Two of the three single-member households were ‘young single female’ households, while the third was a ‘single male’ household. The remaining eight households varied in size from two members (two households) to four members (two households). Three-member households were the most common (four households). All participant households expanded in size periodically when members of these households who lived away visited for varying lengths of time.

⁵⁷ The selection of respondents in any academic work, necessarily limits the scope of the work.. Whilst I have explained the reasons for selecting the respondents as I have – primarily driven by practical considerations – as the respondents were high caste and mostly men, this necessarily means that I did not have the opportunity to examine the practices of lower caste Hindus and women. For future research work a focus on women and lower caste Hindus would further illuminate praxis.

The most common visitors were married sons and daughters and their children, brothers and sisters, and parents. Of the eight married couples, only two were of different castes and regions. Their marriages would be described in India as ‘love marriages’. The remaining six couples were from the same caste and region and were in ‘arranged marriages’—where the match is made by parents or other family members.

Barring one or two elderly members, the adult members of the participant households were all graduates; however, the members of the households came from different occupational backgrounds. Three of the men were retired, two from the civil service and one from the Indian army. Seven men worked in government and non-government organisations, either as employees or consultants. One man ran a business, which involved running a factory. The wives of the retired men had never been in paid employment. Of the remaining adult women, both women from the two ‘single female’ households worked for a non-governmental organisation. The three women with young children did not work, as they were looking after their children and taking care of the house.⁵⁸ The remaining three women worked as an accountant, a health professional and a senior manager in a non-governmental funding agency.

Four of the 11 respondents were associated with an NGO working in the region. As described in more detail in 4.5.4, the not-for-profit sector began as an alternative to the public and the private sector to complement them, to challenge them and to hold them accountable. Many were inspired by Gandhian philosophy especially the empowerment of the underprivileged sections and rural communities. But the NGO sector too has evolved and diversified. The constant quest for funding and the ‘corporatisation’ of NGOs has forced many NGOs to move away from ‘barefoot’, grassroots organisations to business operations, where those who work there see themselves as ‘professionals’ rather than ‘ideological actors’. The participants in this study who were associated with the NGO could have as easily worked for the government or the private sector. Through my observations there was no evidence that their occupation shaped their food preferences or practices.

All the participant households would describe themselves as middle-class households. These households are in a respectable middle-class neighbourhood and their members are

⁵⁸ Since completion of the fieldwork, all three have started to work: one woman is supporting her husband in running the factory, another is working as a lawyer, and the third is working as a part-time researcher for a research institute.

educated and have white-collar jobs. However, it is difficult to define what constitutes the middle class, and its characteristics are hard to pin down beyond vague and general indicators. The monthly household incomes of the participant households varied from 25,000 rupees (US\$500) to 150,000 rupees (US\$3,000). The savings and assets of these households varied even more. Even after factoring in the different life stages of the households (households comprising older people are more likely to have more in assets and savings than are younger households), there were clear differences in the level of socio-economic wellbeing and status of the participant households. While four households owned the houses that they lived in, the dwelling ranged from one-bedroom units to sprawling bungalows with five bedrooms, annexes and outhouses. While a few participant households had two cars, at least two owned 'two-wheelers' i.e. scooters and motorbikes, and two did not own any private conveyance.

The participant households also varied in their members' quality and level of educational attainment, positions held in the organisations in which they worked and level of exposure to the wider world. This was reflected in consumption of media products, tastes and preferences. The better educated, better earning households subscribed to *The Times of India*, a popular English daily, and magazines such as *India Today* and *Outlook*, while some others subscribed to Hindi dailies. A few did not subscribe to any newspapers or magazines. However, no participant household subscribed to any academic weekly or monthly magazines or financial dailies. While all participant households had Tata Sky TV connections, they were used to tune into Hindi channels to watch serials (television dramas) and news programmes. One household, where the wife of a retiree traded shares online, had the financial news channel turned on while the share market was open. There was little interest in local English channels or in international channels such as the BBC. Two exceptions were Star Movies and the Discovery channel, especially Discovery Hindi, which some members of a few participant households would tune in to occasionally.

2.3.2.2 *The caste of households*

Of the 11 participant households, one household was a Jain household. While Jainism does not specifically have castes like Hinduism, Jains were traditionally drawn from the Bania or trading caste and are still associated with this caste today. Three households belonged to Brahmin castes (one from the hills of Uttarakhand and two from the plains

of Uttar Pradesh), while the remaining seven households were Kshatriya (warrior caste)—five from the hills of Uttarakhand and two from the plains.

Jains have traditionally practiced vegetarianism in food habits, but this is not necessarily true today. While the Jain participant household in this study had traditionally been vegetarian, and while the husband and wife (Dr and Mrs Mehta) are vegetarian—although the husband would eat eggs occasionally and also cook eggs for the family dog—their grown up sons, who live in other towns but visit regularly, are both fond of eating meat.

The Brahmin household from the hills cooked and consumed meat at home. However, while members of this household claimed that cooking and eating meat was a common practice in their sub-caste, other members of the sub-caste who lived in the neighbourhood and practiced strict vegetarianism disagreed and considered the food practices of consuming meat a deviation from the norm.

The Brahmin households from the plains were both from communities that were historically vegetarian. However, in the case of one of the two households, while the husband and wife did not eat meat themselves or cook it at home, they would allow their young son to have meat when on an outing. The young single woman from the second Brahmin household from the plains, who stayed alone, ate meat and while her father's family was traditionally vegetarian, her father had started to eat meat at a young age and also encouraged her mother to eat meat after their marriage.

Of the two *Kshatriya* households from the plains, one came from a family that had a tradition of eating meat, while the other came from a family that did not have this tradition. However, when a woman who came from a meat-eating household married into the traditionally vegetarian household, meat was regularly cooked in the household. Conversely, the household that had a tradition of eating meat had adopted vegetarianism later in life.

The *Kshatriya* households from the hills of Uttarakhand, five in total, all came from communities that historically ate meat. In two households, meat was regularly cooked and consumed. In two household, the cooking and consumption of meat—once a common practice—had completely stopped because the wives, despite being from the same sub-caste, as husbands, were strict vegetarians. In these households, the husbands continued to consume meat outside the house. In the case of the last household, the husband, who had consumed meat as a child, had stopped eating meat; but meat was still cooked at

home because the wife, a woman from a coastal state of India and from a tradition of eating meat, cooked and ate meat at home.

2.3.2.3 A brief description of some household members observed during fieldwork

Abhimanyu and his cousin Raju—Friends of Anil Pande's son. Raju's mother is from Goa and eats meat. While Abhimanyu's parents are strict vegetarian Brahmins, Abhimanyu is frequently exposed to meat through his cousins' meat-eating practices.

Ameya—A single woman working in Sushant Lok. A Kshatriya by caste and coming from a meat eating family from Delhi, she has become a vegetarian. She stays in one of the renovated outhouses at Dr Mehra's house.

Anoushka—A single woman working and living in Sushant Lok. She is a Brahmin from eastern Uttar Pradesh and even though her father's family was vegetarian her father started to eat meat and later cook it at home. Anoushka eats meat.

Anshul—Works at the NGO.

Govind's Family—Govind is a good friend of Manoj Thakur and is from the hills of Uttarakhand. He trained as a chef before working in the NGO. He is married to Anu and they are both Kshatriyas by caste. Govind eats meat while Anu does not.

Dr Karim—A Muslim friend who lives in the neighbourhood and previously rented part of Mr Mehta's house while he was building a property in Dehradun. He and his wife are both medical doctors.

Lal Chacha—A 'hill Brahmin' who eats meat and lives with his aging parents. Lal Chacha is unmarried. Mahendra works in his house.

Madhvan—Madhvan is from the hills and is a *Kshatriya* by caste. While a keen meat eater, in keeping with his Hindu practices Madhvan gave up meat and alcohol for one year when his mother died.

Manish's Family—Manish is a friend of Govind and Manoj. He and his wife, Anvita, are both Kshatriyas by caste. Anvita is vegetarian.

The Mehta Family—Dr Narendra Mehta is a retired officer of the Indian Administrative Service. He is a Jain by religion and father to Amit and Gautam, as well as the owner of a cocker spaniel named Peaches. Amit is married to Sonia (a Bania by caste), and Gautam

is married to Anvita (a Jain). Amit is an Army officer, while Gautam trained as a chef in Australia. Mrs Mehta is a Jain and studied science at university. Mr Ram and Mr Pandit are both friends of Dr Mehta.

Anil Pande's Family—Anil Pande and his wife are vegetarian Brahmins from western Uttar Pradesh. However, they encourage their son to eat meat.

Ramesh and Appu—Friends of Manoj and Manish. Ramesh has recently returned from the United States.

Mr Rathour—A *Kshatriya* from the hills who eats meat. His father was an army officer. Mr Rathour has always eaten meat but avoids meat on Saturdays in honour of Shani.

Sanjiv—A neighbourhood friend.

The Thakur Family—Manoj Thakur grew up in the hills though he is a *Kshatriya* from eastern Uttar Pradesh. He is an NGO worker married to Nivedhitha, with a two-year-old son, Mahesh. Bahadur works in their house.

Vikram—A worker at the NGO. He is a Brahmin from western Uttar Pradesh and a vegetarian and a teetotaler.

2.4 Sources of Data

The participant households were the main source of data. All members of these households were interviewed and observed. In addition, friends and relatives were also observed when they visited and were interviewed selectively. Further data were also collected from three other sources:

1. The behaviour of people, especially their handling and consumption of food, in public spaces was documented via participant observation. These spaces included markets, supermarkets, meat shops, shopping malls, corner food stalls, restaurants and fast food joints, and temples and surrounding areas.
2. Detailed key informant interviews were conducted with stakeholders such as owners of food stalls and restaurants, meat shop owners and people in the food trade.
3. Data were collected via media monitoring. For this purpose, I relied on one financial daily (*The Economic Times*), two English dailies (*The Indian Express* and *The Times of India*) and two local Hindi dailies (*Amar Ujala* and *Dainik*

Jagran). I also followed some popular food shows on television such as Sanjeev Kapoor's *Khana Khazana* (Treasure of Food), Singh and Cook, Highway on my Plate and *Zaika India Ka* (Tastes of India). I also scanned some of the popular websites for recipes, which were mostly in English and hosted by Indian women living overseas and targeting the Indian diaspora, especially single men and newly married women in need of cooking tips.

As the first step of engagement with the participant households, each household was asked to complete a brief structured questionnaire to collect socio-economic information on the household and its members. The questionnaire included questions on age, caste affiliation, whether the household was vegetarian, occupation, subscription to media, and so on. There were a few questions on social perceptions and attitudes such as the role of women and freedom of choice for children, particularly girls. The survey also included questions on food habits and practices. The purpose of this exercise was to set the socio-economic context of the participating household.

Data were also collected from participant households by accompanying them on shopping trips; in particular, I was interested in what they buy, where from and why. On average, I joined participants on two shopping trips per household (each lasting about an hour) in each of the four distinct seasons. (The availability of food and food practices in India continue to be heavily influenced by season.) I also requested that the participant households allow me access to their kitchens to observe and record practices around storage, cooking and consumption of food products, especially meat. I undertook three or four sessions with each household (each lasting not more than two hours) in each season to capture the routine consumption practices.

Where possible, a similar approach was used to cover life-cycle and celebratory events in participating households, including births, naming ceremonies, marriage, death, birthdays, parties and festivals. In particular, I was interested in looking at the role of meat and its place in celebration and feasting. I had aimed to cover four or five such events in each participating household in the course of my fieldwork but was able to attend and observe far fewer.

Following my review of the literature, I developed a framework to guide my study on the practices of meat consumption and its avoidance as part of the larger everyday food practices of the north Indian Hindus of Sushant Lok (see Table 1).

Table 1: Framework

Who procures meat?	Gender	Age	Status		
Cooking of meat	Bought cooked	Bought uncooked (Who cooks?)	Cooked in kitchen	Cooked outside	Utensils
Who consumes meat?	Gender	Age	Status in household		
Where is it consumed?	Home	Outside	At home of others		
When is it consumed?	Days	Occasions	Meal/time of day	Frequency	
How is it consumed?	Type of meat	Type of preparation	Snack or meal	Accompaniment	
Why is it consumed?	Routine	Celebration	Formal meal	Informal meal	Entertainment
With whom is it consumed?	Family	Friends	Relatives	Same age	All ages

CHAPTER 3: EVERYDAY FOOD PRACTICES IN SUSHANT LOK

Every man carries within himself a world made up of all that he has seen and loved; and it is to this world that he returns, incessantly, though he may pass through and seem to inhabit a world quite foreign to it.

— François-René de Chateaubriand, *Voyage en Italie*

As outlined in the preceding chapters, India has witnessed rapid change in the last two and a half decades. While food in India remains a relatively underexplored area of enquiry, one aspect of food consumption has recently attracted more attention; namely, the increased consumption of animal products in general and meat in particular. Policy reports and papers on the animal products sector of the economy report strong growth in the sector and forecast its bright prospects (Dastagiri, 2004; Gandhi & Mani, 1995; Sinha & Giri, 1989).

In a more recent work on the trends in the consumption of livestock products in India, Gandhi and Zhou (2010) used NSSO data collected between 1970–71 and 2004–05 to estimate the changes taking place in food consumption patterns in India, especially the consumption of animal products. Their conclusion: meat consumption in India is on the rise. For each year over the coming decade, demand for milk is predicted to grow 10.6 per cent, eggs to grow 7.4 per cent and meat to grow 8.4 per cent.

Impressive though the figures on increased meat consumption in India are, it is important to recognise that any reported change in India in animal product consumption, in particular as regards meat, is a change from very low base figures, making it appear more impressive, than it actually is, when stated in percentage terms. Despite the sustained increase in per capita consumption of meat in India over the last decade or more, a recent report puts per capita meat consumption in India at 3.4 kilograms per year (OECD, 2017). The same report places Australia at the top of the table, with a per capita meat consumption of 93 kilograms per year. Fish, eaten predominantly in the coastal regions of India, remains the single most important category of meat, by volume, consumed in India.

The findings from this more recent focus on increased meat consumption in India usually point to greater disposable income and/or the desire to emulate ‘western’ consumption choices, as illustrated by the following two quotations:

It’s just to do with the country progressing. The mindset is changing and no one really sticks to traditional values anymore (Ishita Manek, A bartender from a vegetarian Hindu family and an enthusiastic member of the Mumbai Meat Marathon, a group that gets together every weekend to try out protein-heavy dishes). (NY Daily News, 2013)

People in India are just imitating the Western lifestyle ... Overall, we’re seeing them become distanced from their own cultural traditions. Added to that, you have factors like globalization and growing mobility, with people traveling more and more often to the West (Dr Sanjay Sanadhya, a diabetes expert, New Delhi). (Esselborn, 2013)

These more recent explanatory models are contrasted with the historic focus on caste hierarchy whereby Hindu food practices are guided by the notion of parallel hierarchies of caste and food. Vegetarian food, which sits at the top of the food hierarchy, separates vegetarian Brahmins from other Hindus who may eat meat. Beef consumption separates caste Hindus from scheduled castes, the latter being at the bottom of the caste hierarchy and consuming food that sits at the bottom of the food hierarchy (Ambedkar, 1948).

This thesis adds to this existing literature by building upon the structures of caste and increased wealth in explaining the avoidance or eating of meat. In focusing on everyday household food practices, and the richness that this analysis brings, we can see that meat consumption and avoidance is a tool through which Hindus in north India maintain their identities or redefine them and signal these identities to themselves and to others.

3.1 Changes to the ‘Everyday’

To understand the place of meat in food practices, we must first have an understanding of the everyday food practices. Such an understanding may well be intuitive when writing about one’s own society. Drawing on my observations of both participant households and my lived experience, this chapter looks at the everyday food practices in Sushant Lok to understand what people consume every day, how and why.

3.2 Manoj's World—Home and the NGO Office

3.2.1 The household

Manoj is 35 years old. He lives with his wife and two-year-old son in a two-bedroom rented accommodation on the first floor of a bungalow in Sushant Lok. The house is airy and well built; a large terrace overlooks the tea estate. Manoj is from a Thakur (Kshatriya) family from Kayampur, a mofussil town in eastern Uttar Pradesh; however, he was born and brought up in the hill station of Srinagar, where his father was a professor of engineering in the State University. His mother, also a Ph.D., has been a homemaker all her married life. Manoj went to an elite college in Srinagar and later completed his Ph.D. from the same university where his father was a professor. He is now the coordinator and office head of the Dehradun office of an NGO. Manoj's father, now retired, has moved back to Kayampur, where he now farms his ancestral land.

Manoj's wife Nivedhitha is from a Thakur family in Sultanpur, also in eastern Uttar Pradesh. It was Manoj's father who arranged Nivedhitha's marriage with Manoj by contacting her family and negotiating the alliance. In keeping with the customary practice of marriages in India, it is an arranged endogamous marriage. They have been married for four years.

3.2.2 The kitchen

As it is with most households in India, the kitchen in Manoj's house is his wife, Nivedhitha's, domain. It is a rectangular room adjacent to the living room and not the brightest part of the house. The window that allows natural light to filter in is small and years of exposure to smoke from the kitchen have coated the wire mesh with soot and grime. (Exhaust fans in kitchens are a recent phenomenon and by no means universal.) An L-shaped cement slab runs at waist height from left to right, terminating in a sink, or washbasin.

The centrepiece of the kitchen is a two-hob stove placed on the cement slab, connected to a gas cylinder by a bright orange tube. An assortment of lentils, beans, spices and pickles add a spot of colour to the kitchen. They are arranged in jars along the shelf, within sight and easy reach. Often these are recycled coffee jars and jam bottles made of glass, but in Manoj's house these have been replaced by the 'airtight' plastic *Pearl Pet* storage containers available in supermarkets in various sizes. Next to the gas stove are

items that are used regularly and frequently: spices and salt, kept in a round container with several removable spice trays, cooking oil, tealeaf and sugar. Also at hand is a rack of baskets containing daily essentials such as potatoes, onions, garlic, chillies and ginger. Rice and wheat flour are stored in large aluminium containers underneath the cement slab. While wheat flour is bought from the local market, Manoj's father sends rice and *arhar* (pigeon pea lentil) from the family farm, sometimes bringing them with him on the overnight train from the station near his town to Dehradun, a distance of just under 1000 kilometres.

The commonly used utensils include pots and pans of various sizes, made of steel or aluminium. Given the centrality of lentils/beans, vegetables, rice and *chapatti* (unleavened flatbread) to Indian meals, no Indian kitchen could function without a pressure cooker, the most energy- and time-efficient way of cooking lentils/beans; a *kadhai*, a large wok made of iron or aluminium used for cooking vegetables, both dry and with gravy; a *tawa*, a round iron plate used for making *chapatti*; and a *patila*, a deep sauce pan used for cooking rice. In addition, Manoj's kitchen is equipped with a mixer-blender, a toaster and a sandwich maker, the basic electrical devices. Like most Indian kitchens, it has a water purifier—an RO machine installed above the sink. Unlike most Indian kitchens, there is also a microwave. Manoj recently bought a larger refrigerator, in part to replace the old fridge and in part to meet the household's 'growing needs'.

3.2.3 Breakfast

Manoj's day begins with a cup of tea made by his wife: a sweet, milky preparation, locally known as *chai*. Breakfast, the first meal of the day offers Nivedhitha scope to experiment; however, the most common breakfasts are bread and butter, sometimes accompanied by eggs, or plain or stuffed parathas (pan-fried unleavened bread) to go with eggs, vegetables or beans like *kala chana* (Bengal gram). Manoj rarely consumes milk except when it is used to prepare *chai* or on the rare occasion when he has corn flakes with lukewarm milk.

3.2.4 NGO office—First half

Manoj drives to his office, which is less than half a kilometre from his residence, after breakfast. Once in his office, Manoj asks for a cup of tea. Tea is made frequently in the NGO office and is necessary whenever a visitor comes by. Although green tea and *tulsi* (basil) tea are also prepared sometimes, tea in the office usually means *chai*. Even green tea and herbal *tulsi* tea are prepared in the fashion of *chai*, although without milk;

however, sugar is added to both. Snacks are also ordered when there are visitors. The nature of snacks depends on who the visitors are and when they visit. If they are important visitors, they may be served plum cake from Ellora or Standard bakery and *samosa* from Bisht Dairy or the Universal sweets shop nearby.

Sometimes lunch is prepared in the kitchen of the NGO office. This happens mainly for two reasons. Many of the NGO's staff live by themselves. They have barely functional kitchens where they cook under various restrictions placed on them by their landlords. They often cook in the NGO kitchen either because they have not brought lunch or because they want to eat something that they are craving but cannot cook at home. When Nivedhitha is away, Manoj eats at the NGO office. At such times he becomes the focus of cooking at the NGO; much of the cooking is done to suit Manoj's palate. He also pays for the bulk of the expenses. When lunch is cooked at the NGO office, Govind, the office manager who trained and once worked as a chef, takes the lead in cooking, although other members of the staff help him. Involvement in cooking and participation in meals at the NGO is also an indication of the staff's level of comfort with and proximity to Manoj. Those who are the closest to him are also the most active and enthusiastic participants in the lunch making. Sometimes a meat dish may be prepared. When this happens, Manoj supervises and guides the cooking of the meat dishes, although Govind does the actual cooking. On such occasions, chicken curry is the most commonly prepared dish. In the afternoon, a cleaner comes to wash the dishes and clean the kitchen. On the rare occasion that she does not report for work, the NGO staff, led by Govind, clean the kitchen and wash the dishes while Manoj continues working at his desk.

3.2.5 Lunch

If he is not eating lunch at the NGO, Manoj drives back home at around 1:30 pm for lunch. Nivedhitha prepares lunch at home, although Bahadur, a student who also works part-time at the NGO as an office boy, may assist her. As Manoj's family are from eastern Uttar Pradesh, steamed rice and *arhar* dhal, accompanied by fried potatoes and dry vegetables⁵⁹, is the preferred lunch, although *chapatti* may also be prepared. When he lived in Srinagar, Manoj said that his father ate *arhar* dhal and rice every day for lunch. In Manoj's house, *arhar* is still the most commonly cooked dhal, although under Nivedhitha's influence other lentils are also cooked regularly. Manoj is very fond of

⁵⁹ Without gravy

pickles; they are a regular accompaniment to his meals and an item that his mother sends regularly from the village. Yogurt may be served with lunch sometimes but is not a regular feature of meals in this house. As there are only two adult members in the household, Nivedhitha often joins Manoj for lunch, especially when Bahadur is present to help in the kitchen and serve. However, when there is a guest, Nivedhitha stays in the kitchen, working or supervising, while Manoj and the guest eat at the table. After lunch and a brief rest at home, Manoj heads back to the NGO office at around 3:00 pm.

3.2.6 NGO office—Second half

Once back at the NGO office, Manoj has more tea and if he feels hungry later in the afternoon, or dissatisfied with the lunch, he asks for Maggi noodles. Bahadur or Govind buy a packet of Maggi or Top Ramen noodles from the nearby shop. It is sometimes cooked with onion and tomatoes but mostly on its own and served with tomato sauce. Manoj also regularly sends staff to get him aerated drinks from the nearby shops in Sushant Lok shopping enclave/market. Mountain Dew, a drink similar to Sprite, is his preferred aerated drink. When ordering a cold drink for himself, Manoj may ask for a small bag of potato chips. Lays and Uncle Chips are his favourite brands.

3.2.7 Shopping

While pickles, rice and *arhar* lentils may come from his father's farm, other items must be bought from the local market. Manoj may buy the occasional item that Nivedhitha asks for at short notice or may indulge in the impulse buying of pickles, chutneys and packaged snacks, but neither Manoj nor Nivedhitha do the everyday shopping. However, they do occasionally go together to Mega Mart, Easy Day or Suvidha, the latter two being recently opened supermarkets. On these trips, they use their car and normally combine shopping with an 'outing'.

Day-to-day shopping is the responsibility of Bahadur, who goes to Pretty Market almost every evening to buy vegetables and other grocery items that may be needed. Mahesh, the two-year-old son of Manoj and Nivedhitha, often accompanies him on such visits. Pretty Market is just a couple of hundred metres from Manoj's house. Once in Pretty Market, while Bahadur buys vegetables from the greengrocers and groceries from Lalu's grocery store, Mahesh learns the art of being a consumer by selecting and trying chips and other packaged savoury snacks, chocolates and candies.

3.2.8 Dinner

Dinner is normally a vegetable in gravy, a dry vegetable and *chapatti*, although lentils and rice are also often cooked for dinner, especially if there is a guest at short notice and meat cannot be cooked. Yogurt is generally absent from the dinner menu. Any leftovers from lunch are eaten at dinner. If there is something in the leftovers that Manoj is fond of, it is served to him for dinner. However, if he is not interested in the leftovers, they go to Nivedhitha, or more often to Mahesh.

3.3 The Everyday Food Practice of Participant Households in Sushant Lok

Despite the various changes in the aggregate meat consumption figures for India, the everyday food practices that I observed in Sushant Lok remain essentially vegetarian, including for those who do eat meat. The dry stored food in the kitchen, the wide variety of lentils and beans and large quantities of rice and flour not only add colour to the kitchen, they tell us something about the staple food of the residents. Whether the household is vegetarian or enjoys meat dishes, the day-to-day staples of the observed households are lentils, beans, rice and *chapatti*.

Three meals a day—breakfast, lunch and dinner—punctuated by many cups of tea and snacks of some kind in the evening is the norm. Breakfast, the first meal of the day, follows early morning tea and is served at different times to different members of the household. School-going children are the first to have their breakfast and, in most cases, the first to leave home. Wives, especially housewives, eat breakfast after their husbands leave for work. If they are caught up in work, they may forget or forgo breakfast. Bread of some kind is the dominant component of breakfast, often washed down with *chai* or, in the case of children, milk.

In most households, lunch involves dahl of some kind, accompanied by steamed rice, *chapatti*, a dry vegetable and an accompaniment, mostly pickle. Sometimes yogurt or *raita*—a savoury yogurt dish—may also be served. Yogurt and *raita* are more commonly served for lunch and more frequently consumed in the summer months. In some households, *papad*, known in English as ‘pappadum’, may be served to accompany lunch or at the end of lunch, but are used more commonly as a snack or an accompaniment to alcoholic drinks. In Sushant Lok, most men go home for lunch. If for some reason they cannot on any day, or if they are ‘out of station’, lunch preparation at home may be scaled

down or skipped altogether, unless children are to be given a meal upon return from school, which is usually the case.

The evening tea is accompanied by a snack. These used to be homemade preparations of locally popular snacks, but increasingly they are savoury Indian snacks, *namkeen* of one brand or another and biscuits. When the weather is nice or when guests, especially relatives, are expected, snacks are made at home. Buying freshly made snacks, especially *samosa*, from one of the many sweets shops nearby is also common.

On most days, dinner is a vegetable with gravy, a dry vegetable and *chapatti* or *parantha*, and in some cases dahl and steamed rice. Dahl and rice are more commonly made for dinner in the households where husbands do not come home for lunch. Sometimes there is a dessert: usually an Indian sweet, although ice cream is increasingly common. Often desserts are leftovers from an earlier celebration, festival or a visit by a guest, especially a relative.

In its elaborateness and regularity, dinner is the most important meal of the day. The importance of dinner is derived from its symbolic nature. Dinner marks the end of the day, a reward for the toils of the day, a time to look back with satisfaction on the day gone past in the company of the members of the family. It has, in theory, the potential to bring all members of the family together for a meal. Indeed, advertisements on television are replete with images of happy families around dinner tables, pushing not only their products but also a standardised image of the ideal family and ideal dinner. Having seen these advertisements, one would expect that family reunion is played out daily at the dinner table. However, was this ever the case in most Indian households, or is it a western custom transported to India, adopted by some westernised families, and being passed off as a norm?

The reason I pose this question is because traditionally Hindu households in north India used the kitchen as their dining space. Members sat on the floor and ate their meals one group at a time. Kitchens were small and could not have accommodated all family members at the same time. Women were the last to eat. Today, unless there is help in the kitchen, one or more adult females (mother or mother and daughter) are invariably occupied with making *chapatti* or *parantha* and serving food and so are unable to join the family at the dinner table. Indeed, the dining table, the 'meeting ground of the family', itself is mostly used only when there are guests. At other times it is used for various purposes ranging from worktable and study table to a storage platform. Individual

members have their meals at the coffee table, or ‘centre table’ as it is often called, while watching television.

3.4 Structure and Variation

3.4.1 Structure of a meal

In a paper published in 1972, Mary Douglas describes a meal as possessing certain defining characteristics, which place it in the category of meals as the term is understood:

weekday lunches tend to have a tripartite structure, one element stressed accompanied by two or more unstressed elements ... Meals are ordered in scale of importance and grandeur ... The smallest, meanest meal metonymically figures the structure of the grandest and each unit of the grand meal figures again the whole meal ... A meal stays in the category of meal only insofar as it carries this structure which allows the part to recall the whole. (p. 67)

Given extremes of income equality in India and widespread abject poverty, not to mention enormous diversity, assigning any structure to meals is hazarding an extreme oversimplification. However, with this warning I will attempt the same. Among Hindus in north India a meal must have at least one stressed element (a cereal) and one unstressed element (a vegetable, dhal or dairy item such as yogurt, buttermilk or milk). Beyond this basic structure, the structure of any meal is a function of wealth, regional affiliation, season, taste, and occasion. The structure of meals described above is applicable to middle-class households from north India living in Sushant Lok. Within this structure, however, meals could differ daily, the variation a function of a number of factors including those mentioned above.

3.4.2 Every day and seasonal variations—The role of *Ayurveda* in everyday food practices

Variation is introduced through an established conception of what each meal of the day should be but altering the composition of meals through the days of the week, and through the seasons. In all of this, taste alone is not a consideration. The choice of any food item, the manner in which it is cooked, what accompanies it, and at what time it is eaten are influenced by what *Ayurveda* describes as the intrinsic characteristic of that food item—*Ayurveda* being the ancient Indian medical system handed down to people as a lived science. To give a few examples: cucumber and radish can be eaten in the morning and

afternoon, but not at night. Their *taseer*⁶⁰ (intrinsic property) is cold. Yogurt, similarly cold, should be avoided at night, while hot milk is advisable before bed. Beans and lentils are ideally consumed during the day, as they are heavy, and should be avoided at dinner.

Emphasis is also placed on eating seasonal fruits and vegetables, as they are considered ideal for the prevailing weather conditions. It is believed that out-of-season fruit or vegetables are not only difficult to assimilate but could actually cause sickness. Unlike in the rich advanced economies, where everything is available throughout the year, it is not common to see out-of-season fruits and vegetables in the markets in India. This is not solely due to the preference for in-season fruits and vegetables. It is also because of the limited market integration in India and the related issue of ease of movement of goods across regions, lack of cold storage, inefficient cold chains and the cost involved in making out-of-season fruits and vegetables available. The Indian customer is also highly price sensitive, so out-of-season fruits and vegetables are constrained by both demand- and supply-side issues. However, there are signs of change, as illustrated by the descriptions of the fruit and vegetable vendors of Sushant Lok in Chapter 2.

The change is occurring in two directions, often simultaneously. On the one hand, with relative improvement in infrastructure and market integration, more out-of-season fruits and vegetables are now available than ever before. In the case of Dehradun, large quantities of these fruits and vegetables are brought to the market every day from the surrounding hills where the weather is cool in the summer months and so conducive to the growing of what are out-of-season fruits and vegetables in the plains. In many middle-class households, consumption of out-of-season vegetables is frequent, especially when there are guests. These vegetables both offer a change from the routine seasonal vegetables and, being more expensive, signal affluence. In the same household, a parallel trend of increased consumption of squashes and gourds of various kinds may also be witnessed.

Squashes and gourds are traditional Indian vegetables and, in the past, have been looked down on as poor man's vegetables, while European vegetables such as cabbage, cauliflower, carrots and peas were favoured. However, with the arrival of popular yoga gurus, especially Baba Ramdev of Patanjali Yogpeeth in Haridwar, and their yoga and

⁶⁰ Incidentally, *taseer* is an Arabic word, which must have been brought to India by Arabs, who also introduced the *Yunani* (Greek) system of medicine to India. This system is quite similar to *Ayurveda*, hence the adoption of the word *taseer* to describe the intrinsic properties of a substance.

wellbeing channels on satellite TV, the downward trajectory of gourds and squashes was reversed. Through his message of yoga as a part of holistic wellbeing and the importance of food in wellbeing, Ramdev privileged the once-discarded gourds and squashes as ideal for good health and as a panacea to various common ailments. He based his recommendations, once again, on the science of *Ayurveda* and yoga. Gourds and squashes, previously available at throwaway prices, today can be almost as expensive as other vegetables because of this increased demand. The demand for these vegetables comes not only from individual households, but also from drug companies making extracts from various vegetables and herbs. Ayurvedic vegetable juices and other extracts can easily be bought today, including from Baba Ramdev's retail chain, Patanjali Ayurved, which had a turnover of more than US\$380 million in 2014–15 (Acharya, 2015).

3.4.3 Regional influence of everyday food practices

A popular Hindi proverb sums up the cultural diversity of India in a line: *Teen kos pe badle paani, ek kos par bhaasha* [The colour and taste of water changes every 45 kilometres, and the language changes every 15 kilometres]. The same could be said of food practices. There are significant culinary differences between the various regions of India. Within a region, each state has its own culinary peculiarities and within a state various parts may have their own specialised cuisines. For example, in the state of Uttar Pradesh the cuisine of western Uttar Pradesh and Brij region is quite different from the cuisine of eastern Uttar Pradesh (Purvanchal). The region of Bundelkhand, also in Uttar Pradesh has its own distinct cuisine. In each of these regions, the everyday food practices among Hindus are determined by community and caste affiliation.

3.4.4 Wheat- and rice-eating regions in north India

In addition to the categories of culinary differences listed above, in north India an important distinction in food practices is based on whether the staple food is rice or wheat. Wheat-eating sub-regions in north India lie west and north of eastern and central Uttar Pradesh. Linguistically, the rice region ends and the wheat/millet region begins when people stop referring to the main meals of the day as *bhaat* (cooked rice) and start referring to them as *roti* (unleavened Indian bread, also called *chapatti*). The two regions

also differ in their lentil type preference,⁶¹ the vegetables that are grown⁶² and how they are consumed.⁶³ Cooking styles also vary across regions. In the wheat region, there is less emphasis on onion and garlic in cooking, both of which are commonly used in the rice region. Conversely, more dairy, especially yogurt, is used in cooking and as an accompaniment to food in the wheat region. In India, there is an inverse relationship between the consumption of dairy products and the consumption of meat. The north reports a high consumption of dairy, while the figures for meat consumption are low even by Indian standards. Within north India, the rice region has a higher incidence of meat eating (including fish), while the wheat region has a higher reliance on dairy in everyday food.

3.4.5 The (lesser) influence of class

Food practices in India vary across class groupings, as would be expected. However, given the regional and caste-based variation in food practices, the practices varied less across class and more across caste and region. While it may be more acceptable to experiment with food today, until recently recognition came from adhering to and excelling in the food practices of one's region and caste (Baviskar, 2012). Given the elaborate detailing of acceptable and unacceptable food practices and strict restrictions on commensality, it is not surprising that there was a strong incentive for adhering to tradition. Within the ambit of acceptable everyday food practices, there was scope for signalling one's class status. This scope manifested itself in the ingredients used for cooking, the variety of dishes cooked, the accompaniments and condiments that were served with the food, the seating arrangements and the manner of serving, the dishes that food was served from and on, and the number and status of people present. All of these continue to signal class, but a few other means of signalling have been added.

Despite the trend in society wherein more people can afford a wide variety of food, including food that was once considered a luxury, as reflected in increased consumption

⁶¹ The rice region has an overwhelming reliance on *arhar* or pigeon pea, while *urad* (black gram), *chana* (split Bengal gram) and *mung* are popular lentils in the wheat region. Within the wheat region, *rajma* (kidney beans), *chole* (chickpeas) and *lobhia* (black eyed beans) spread to other parts from Punjab and although they have been adopted in other states, it is in Punjab that they remain more integrated in everyday food practices.

⁶² Pointed gourd is a popular vegetable in the rice region but not in the wheat region.

⁶³ Jackfruit is cooked when still raw and cooked mostly dry in the wheat region. In the rice region, it is mostly cooked with gravy. Further east, it is not cooked as a vegetable but once ripe is consumed as a fruit.

of processed food, meat, dairy products, snacks, ice creams and other desserts, in many well-off households, everyday food has become simpler, albeit not less expensive. The focus is on authentic regional recipes and ingredients, preferably organic, and on avoiding processed food products. Where processed foods are consumed, attention is paid to the brand and organic products are often preferred over non-organic. While the justification for this is couched in the language of health and environment, there is clearly a desire to distinguish oneself in an ever-expanding and mass-consuming middle class. The emphasis is on the simplicity and authenticity of everyday food and deep knowledge of 'genuine' foreign cuisines, when they are consumed, and the practices around them.

Ghee and sweets, once markers of affluence and class, have been the casualties of modern medicine. *Ghee*, which was a common accompaniment to meals, is disappearing from the table because of health concerns⁶⁴, as are sweets, which signalled the end of a meal. Although some households may continue to serve them occasionally, especially when guests or children are present and on festive occasions, because of increased health concerns in the face of a rising incidence of diabetes and cardiovascular disease, this practice is on the decline. When sweets are served, the portions are small, with an emphasis on quality, howsoever it may be defined, rather than quantity.

While in most middle-class households, food may be served in melamine or ceramic dishes, in wealthy households steel or bronze plates and bowls, locally referred to as *thali* and *katori* respectively, are becoming popular again. Not only are they more expensive, they also signal continuity with tradition. At a different level, they require much time and effort to clean and maintain. Therefore, only those who have wealth and kitchen staff can afford them.

3.4.6 Mobile populations, immobile everyday food practices

With the increased mobility of the population and increased urbanisation, individuals and households from various regional, religious, caste and class backgrounds find themselves living near one another. However, while they may have left their native village, they carry it within themselves. Preferences are expressed and taste asserted so that little about 'home' is forgotten. This is best captured in the everyday food practices of households. These practices carry an imprint of the social world in which the members grew up. It is

⁶⁴ In some households ghee is starting to make a comeback as refined oils begin to be discarded, once again in the name of healthy food choices. Ghee is now being spoken of as a healthier fat option compared to many refined oils.

not surprising then that despite living with a diverse population, the everyday food practices of households continue to be their traditional food practices. Despite various cooking shows on television trying their best to popularise regional dishes and cuisines, they remain conspicuously absent from the everyday food practices I observed in Sushant Lok. Occasionally, some households might make popular south Indian dishes such as *sambhar*, *dosa*, *idli* and *vada*, but even these are mostly eaten outside the home. When cooked at home these are mostly cooked from instant pre-mixed packets rather than from scratch. Interestingly, among south Indian dishes, only some have become popular. This is partly due to familiarity with these dishes created over time by neighbourhood south Indian restaurants, until recently the high point of exotic dining experience, and partly because the dishes that became popular sat in the no man's land between 'proper' food (i.e. a meal) and snacks.

3.4.7 Snacks: An exception to rigid food practices

Unlike meals proper, snacks are one area in which more experimentation with and adoption of the 'foreign' have taken place. The packaged snacks segment is dominated by savoury snacks from Rajasthan, a state in the north-west of India, and Gujarat, a state in western India bordering Rajasthan. In the previous section, I mentioned the case of the popular south Indian dishes (*sambhar*, *dosa*, *idli*, and *vada*) and speculated that their popularity, at least in part, owed to their ambiguous position on the food continuum between snacks and meal. Other examples of regional snacks that have acquired pan-Indian status include *chole bhature* from Punjab, *kachori* from Uttar Pradesh, *dhokla* from Gujarat and *pav bhaji* from Maharashtra. Most Indian restaurants, especially those serving 'Indian street food', will serve these dishes. Many households may even prepare these dishes at home occasionally, especially when growing concerns about food safety and hygiene dissuade outside consumption of food. The easy availability of these items in pre-mixes in packaged form makes it easier to prepare them at home. Another category of packaged food that has thrived in recent years is 'Chinese food' (perhaps Indian-Chinese would be a better description). Its popularity is evident from shelves in grocery stores and supermarkets overflowing with packets of Hakka noodles and bottles of soy sauce, green and red chilli sauces, various stir-fry sauces, dressings and marinades. The Indian version of Chinese food has been around for many years as both street food and restaurant food. This familiarity with Indian-Chinese cuisine has facilitated its entry into the household kitchen. Recipes for many more snacks are actively learned through cooking shows on television, prepared at home, commented on and then either discarded

as not worth the time or filed away to impress friends and relatives at some suitable occasion in the future.

Why have regional snacks enjoyed more acceptance than regional meals proper? Tahire Kocturk, a Swedish nutritionist, suggested that food could be divided into three broad categories: staples at the core, surrounded by complements, and accessories on the periphery. New food habits move from the outside to the inside. Therefore, accessories are the most vulnerable to change (Kocturk, 1995). Snacks fall in the category of accessories. Additionally, in India, as most snacks are fried (meaning they have fewer rigid rules around pollution and purity than water-based food) and not considered a meal per se, they occupy an undefined space. As a result, the stringent restrictions placed on food—especially water-based foods—by Hindus are not applicable to snacks. Secondly snacks, especially regional snacks, are infrequently made at home. They are indulged in during ‘outings’ or bought packaged. Thirdly, because of the space they occupy, snacks do not threaten mainstream everyday food, a slow-changing and almost sacred territory. Last but not the least, snacks have been marketed aggressively by corporations who have invested heavily in this sector. In this they have been helped enormously by rapid improvements in packaging, storage and distribution chains.

It is not only the improvement in packaging but its strategic use that has popularised packaged snacks. These products are available in many sizes, including small 50–75 gram packs. This not only widens the market by bringing in those who can only afford to buy smaller packs, but also enables better-off customers to consume packaged snacks more frequently (due to the small serving size), especially while on the go. However, snacks remain snacks; they rarely have the power to replace meals. This is true even in the case of more filling fast food items, which share many attributes of a meal. Thus although one may go to MacDonald’s for a burger or to Domino’s for a pizza, it is still important to be home in time for dinner.

3.5 Other Changes: Kitchens, the Green Revolution and Shopping

The changes in everyday food practice are most noticeable in the rapidly evolving and proliferating snacks and fast food segment. However, this perception could be because of their visibility on shelves, in the hands of consumers and on the table. Images of snacks and fast food are everywhere: on magazine covers, in television advertisements and radio jingles, on billboards, on the signboards of grocery stores, and on vans and auto rickshaws. Even after having been consumed, they refuse to go away. Their shiny empty

packets line the roadsides and drains, a reminder of their omnipresence. However, there have been equally significant, although less noticeable, changes in other aspects of everyday food practices.

3.5.1 Kitchen

3.5.1.1 Appliances

Indian kitchens are not as reliant on electrical devices as western kitchens. The easy and inexpensive availability of domestic help means that time- and labour-saving gadgets are not a priority. However, basic electrical appliances such as mixer-blenders, toasters and sandwich makers are now quite common in middle-class kitchens. They first started to appear in the eighties as part of the dowry of brides to signal affluence and modernity but are now well established in middle-class kitchen paraphernalia. Microwave ovens, although seen sometimes, as in the case of Manoj, are still an uncommon kitchen appliance. In the minds of many middle-class Indians, the cost of a microwave outweighs its utility as a convenient heating device, despite advertising that presents the microwave as a solution to the problems of time, taste, nutrition and variety.

If a microwave's utility does not justify its cost, for a water purification device no price is too much. Most middle class houses have a water purification device of some kind. These have become progressively better and more expensive, keeping pace with the deteriorating quality of water and heightening awareness of the links between contaminated water and disease—addressed only by investing evermore heavily in water purification equipment. Most households have an RO machine installed above the sink. Some kitchens also have small geysers or water heaters installed to enable a supply of warm water for washing dishes during the cold winter months. Other things being equal, the likelihood of a household having a geyser is directly proportional to the amount of time the female household members spend in the kitchen.

Toasters and sandwich makers no doubt have their importance, but these devices signal a shift in food practice not a trigger for that shift. Sandwich makers did not introduce bread, they were bought after bread had firmly established itself in the kitchen. However, three innovations did have far-reaching consequences for everyday food practices: changes in kitchen design and layout, including the introduction of running water; liquid petroleum gas (LPG); and refrigerators. The impact of these innovations on everyday food practices can be seen clearly through comparing households that have access to these

amenities and those that do not, with both types of household continuing to exist alongside one another in current-day India.

3.5.1.2 Layout and design

The traditional style of cooking involved a floor arrangement wherein women sat on the floor and cooked. In this arrangement, the kitchen also functioned as a dining space, with men and women sitting on the floor of the kitchen to have their meals. With the introduction of waist-high counters to work at in the kitchen, cooking suddenly moved from the floor to the elevated bench. This made working in the kitchen easier but also separated the cooking area from the dining area, as people could not sit on the kitchen floor and eat while others worked in the kitchen standing. The effect of the introduction of piped water and sinks to wash dishes not only resulted in time savings, but also completely altered the acceptable standard of treatment of raw food and of washing dishes and utensils. Together, the elevated cooking area and running water in the kitchen made domestic help less indispensable, although the importance of such help in cleaning the house and managing the kitchen revived with increased participation of middle class women in paid employment outside the house.

3.5.1.3 LPG

While changes to the kitchen layout and design changed *where* food was cooked, *where* it was eaten, and *where* dishes were washed, the other two innovations—LPG and refrigeration—had a greater effect on *what* was prepared. The introduction of LPG in the kitchen brought with it the gas stove with two or more hobs, replacing the *bhatti*, a coal-powered masonry oven. Gas stoves allow for better control of heat, enabling the use of many modern utensils that could not be effectively used on *bhatti*, and the preparation of two or more dishes simultaneously. Cooking on LPG is also time effective. It can be used instantly at any time, without prior preparation. By contrast, *bhatti*, which needs filling with coal, lighting and stoking of the fire, does not offer this flexibility. Suddenly, with LPG, a greater variety of foods could be cooked in the same time with little extra effort.

As was common with the introduction of time-saving devices, this did not equate to the women of the house enjoying more leisure time; rather, they used this new-found ‘free-time’ to devote to new-found household chores, particularly as the standards of a good housewife kept pace with the technological innovations. Everyday food became more elaborate, in that the number of dishes increased. However, perishable food supplies still

had to be bought in small quantities and once cooked food had to be consumed quickly because the climatic conditions did not allow for food to be kept for long. This meant that people were used to eating freshly cooked food every time they sat down to eat. This changed with the refrigerator.

3.5.1.4 Refrigerator

A middle-class luxury not so long back, the refrigerator is quite common in India today and has assumed the status of a necessity. In the 1980s and 1990s, refrigerators were placed in the drawing room, a symbol of the prosperity and modernity of the household. Of course, they also served the practical purpose of prolonging the period that cooked and uncooked food could be stored at home. This changed a number of food practices. For example, the kneading of dough for *chapattis* no longer needed to be done daily. Flour could be kneaded and dough stored in the fridge to be used over a few days. Storing a portion of cooked food to cater for an exigency such as an unannounced guest became a common practice. Dinner could be cooked early or even along with lunch to free up time for prime-time television in the evening, children's and husband's lunch boxes could be readied before going to bed, and leftovers could be stored away to be used the next day. When I was growing up in the 1980s and refrigerators were still a novelty, men from the middle class who had recently purchased refrigerators could be heard grumbling about how they had 'spent 5,000 rupees to eat stale food'. No one complains today.

Equally important has been the effect of household refrigerators on the purchase, storage and consumption of processed food, especially milk, yogurt, ice cream, processed cheese and market-bought paneer and butter. With the coming of the household refrigerator, these could all be bought in larger quantities and stored. India's dairy revolution owes its success in no small measure to the rapid spread of refrigerators across households. Frozen snacks and frozen vegetables businesses are starting to take note of the enormous potential of this yet untapped market. However, this segment remains in its nascent stage, for a few reasons: frozen products are quite expensive; the culture of consuming out-of-season fruits and vegetables is still confined to the upper middle class and wealthy⁶⁵; and

⁶⁵ Frozen green peas, first introduced by Safal, are one exception to this general rule. They have been available a number of years and are a firmly established product. There are reasons for the success of frozen green peas in gaining a foothold in the market. They are not very expensive, versatile in having multiple uses, are used in small quantities, and require small storage space.

most importantly, the freezers in Indian refrigerators are small and have limited storage space.

3.5.2 The green revolution and cereals

3.5.2.1 Cereals pre-green revolution: An eclectic mix

Given the climatic conditions prevalent in much of north India—semi-arid with hot summers and cool to cold winters—coarse grains such as finger millets were the main cereals grown: *madua* in the hills and *jowar* and *bajra* in the plains. Maize was grown both in the hills and plains. Wheat was, at best, one of the many cereals grown, and rice was rare. Today, the coarse grains have all but disappeared. In north India, wheat has become the dominant cereal and rice has come to occupy a prominence it never enjoyed in the past. Wheat is present in one form or another in all the major meals in north India, while rice is eaten more frequently than before. For a long time, rice and wheat have enjoyed the status of desired cereals; however, as they were not easily available and expensive, they were the food of the rich. The colonial period, which saw a massive extension of canals and irrigation systems, improved conditions for wheat and rice cultivation in north India, but productivity remained low.

3.5.2.2 The green revolution and the dominance of wheat

In the 1960s, the Indian government, looking to increase the productivity of the agricultural sector to increase food output and supply and thus improve food security, launched the green revolution. This was an input-intensive system of agriculture relying on hybrid seeds, chemical fertilisers, pesticides and insecticides, farm mechanisation and assured irrigation. Overseas, it had been most successful in improving wheat productivity, but had also been effectively adapted to rice in some East Asian countries, especially Japan. It had hardly been tried on millets, or inferior or coarse rain-fed cereals as they were called. The government proposed to buy the increased output of grains to build food stocks as buffers and to distribute cereals through the PDS. The gains from the green revolution were most visible in wheat production, the output of which increased significantly. In their study of a Delhi village between 1957–59 and 1977–78, Freed and Freed (2002) focused on the green revolution and concluded:

from all points of view, wheat is the ideal grain for the Green Revolution. It is not too much of an exaggeration to say that the Green Revolution in Shanti Nagar has been essentially a wheat revolution. (p. 164)

There were impressive gains in rice production as well. Millets were not part of the green revolution and their production declined. Soon there was so much wheat available at such low prices that it made little sense to grow millet or buy it from the market. Today millets are grown only in pockets and on subsistence farms (Fujita, 2010).

3.5.2.3 *The spread of rice*

Improved and assured irrigation and agricultural subsidies, along with agricultural research and extension, were central to the spread of rice cultivation in north India. The north is not a traditional rice-growing region. Rice is a tropical crop that requires high levels of humidity and plenty of water. North India is semi-arid, and the climate ranges from sub-tropical to Mediterranean to temperate in parts. Where rice was grown in the lower valleys of the Himalayas and on hill slopes, it was grown as a rain-fed crop or on small scale around streams. However, high-quality long-grain rice, especially basmati, promised excellent returns. When strains capable of growing in the climatic conditions of the north Indian plains were developed, they spread rapidly across western Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, and along the foothills of the Jammu region, Himachal Pradesh and the *terai* region of Uttarakhand.

None of these new rice-growing areas were traditionally rice eating; therefore, most of the produce was destined for the market, meaning that high-quality rice was suddenly more available and less expensive. Simultaneously, the widespread availability and low cost of wheat, owing to the increase in production and the PDS, resulted in its uptake in areas that were traditionally rice eating or millet eating. This resulted in a change in the cereal mix being consumed and a degree of convergence in cereal consumption between traditional rice and wheat eaters, with rice eaters starting to eat more wheat and wheat eaters starting to eat more rice. Millet eaters started to eat more rice and more wheat.

3.5.2.4 *A reverse snobbery in cereals*

Within this larger picture, there is some ‘noise’. In India, change is rarely unidirectional; for each visible trend, a countertrend can be identified. Cereals are no exception. There is a (wealthy) section of the population that has rediscovered the once-common coarse cereals, which until recently were associated with poverty and the poor. Today, these and other naturally organic grown, but lesser-known, beans and legumes are sold for a premium. The upmarket *Fab India* chain sells a range of organic pickles, chutneys and other processed food items, as well as organic lentils and beans, and *bajra*, *madua* and

ragi, all belonging to the once-rejected category of coarse cereals. These cereals now sit next to such ‘superfoods’ as quinoa and chia seeds, hailed as health foods, and fetch three times the price of regular wheat flour. While coarse cereals may be a niche area of consumption exclusive to the wealthy, even bulk-flour producing companies such as the Aashirwad brand of the Indian Tobacco Company and Pillsbury have started to sell multigrain variants of wheat flour.

3.5.3 Changes and shopping practices

3.5.3.1 Vegetables

The omnipresent fruit and vegetable seller, the constant monitoring of vegetables prices and the many ways in which vegetables are bought reflect the importance of vegetables in everyday food practice. So important is the price of essential vegetables such as potatoes and onions that governments can rise and fall over them, as the BJP-led government in Delhi realised in 1998 when it lost power due to escalating onion prices in the capital (Bhowmick, 2013; The Hindu, 2010).

Vegetables of daily use that can be stored, especially potatoes, onion and garlic, are normally bought in larger quantities, often from a wholesale market called a *mandi*, as the price of vegetables sold there is lower than in the retail market. However, as cities have grown larger, traffic congestion has increased; and as families have become smaller, the practice of buying from the *mandi* has declined. This is because small family sizes do not justify the bulk purchase of food items, which is the only option when shopping at a *mandi*. Moreover, the rising cost of making the round trip to a *mandi*, in terms of time taken and petrol consumed, makes them less attractive.

Seasonal vegetables have typically been bought in smaller quantities from nearby greengrocers. However, as people increasingly buy less from *mandis*, many buy in larger quantities from greengrocers. Widespread use of refrigerators also means that most households can now buy a few days’ supply of vegetables at a time and store them. Most households also extend their patronage to one of the many mobile fruit and vegetable vendors who sell door-to-door. Most of these vendors use a pushcart, although a few have recently started to use motorbikes with baskets. Such vendors are more visible during the winter months when vegetables are plentiful and the weather is more conducive to this kind of business. While they carry a wide variety of vegetables, people tend to buy only in small quantities. The most commonly purchased vegetables are leafy greens and herbs,

although small quantities of peas, tomatoes or other vegetables may also be bought, especially if needed at short notice.

Finally, there are some speciality fruit and vegetable shops from which one can buy out-of-season fruits and exotic vegetables such as broccoli, mushrooms, zucchini, English carrots and capsicums of various bright colours. Most households have a personal rapport with their greengrocer, but speciality fruit and vegetable sellers are an exception to this rule. Here, the relationship is highly impersonal and transactions are very businesslike, perhaps in recognition of the foreign origins of these products and the formality and modernity they signal.

3.5.3.2 Milk

Dairy, in the form of milk, yogurt, *ghee* and butter, is also an integral part of the daily diet, with its intake determined by the disposable income and age of the members of the household, and the region the household is from. In any household, children are the greatest consumers of milk, having a glass in the morning, and if the household can afford it, often in the evening. Until recently, milk was bought from a milkman, who would deliver milk to the doorstep, or from a dairy nearby, to which an individual would walk with their milk can in hand. Now, milk is increasingly bought in packets from grocery stores and supermarkets.

Fears of adulteration and concerns about food safety have driven people to packaged milk in ever-greater numbers. While repeated tests of samples of packaged milk have found signs of adulteration, there is a deep-seated belief that it is safer and purer than the milk supplied by milkmen, arch villains in the eyes of many. Dehradun had a culture of dairies. Outlets calling themselves by the name of one dairy or another can still be seen in every locality and in the major markets. However, many of these are now dairies only in name, having converted into convenience stores, confectionary shops and sweets shops. While milkmen may normally be mistrusted, they are sought by many households with young children:

Mrs Mehta has little faith in milkmen who supply milk door-to-door. Until a couple of years back, she used the services of a milkman but then decided to shift to packaged milk as she was unhappy with the quality of milk being supplied by the milkman. She now gets milk packets from Krishna Lala's shop in Pretty Market, delivered to her house every morning by a shop assistant. However, twice a year she also engages a milkman, one month at a time. She does this when her

son Amit, an army officer, visits when on leave. Amit's one-year-old daughter drinks only cow's milk but it is not available in packaged form⁶⁶.

A number of households with young children use a milkman to access cow's milk. While buffalo's milk is preferred for household use, cow's milk is preferred for children. In yet another example of *Ayurveda* in everyday practice, cow's milk is believed to be easier to assimilate and conducive to the mental growth of a child; buffalo's milk is considered detrimental to it. This is a projection of the attributes assigned to the two animals to their milk. Cows are considered intelligent, whereas buffalo are considered placid and dull.

3.6 Processed Food

If one were to ask an Indian household about their consumption of processed food—or to observe their practices—one would conclude that everyday food practices contain few processed foods. When compared to the food practices of western countries, this may even be true. However, the importance of processed food in the Indian diet has increased steadily. Nowhere is this more evident than in breakfast and snacks. Biscuits accompany morning tea, the first cup of tea after getting up. Some like their biscuits sweet, while others like them savoury. Some may prefer the buttery Good Day, while others may settle for the healthy Cream Cracker. Whatever the choice, biscuits are eaten at all times and always bought in packets from the market.

3.6.1 Breakfast: The most processed meal of all

Traditional Indian breakfast dishes, and there are many of them, are more common in households of elderly people. They appear less frequently in younger households, and then only on weekends and holidays. In many such households, breakfast is largely if not entirely composed of processed food. Mass-produced sliced bread is ubiquitous today—a dramatic change from a time when many Indians refused to consume bread, which they considered unhygienic and polluting due to being a water-based preparation that was bought cooked (baked) from outside.⁶⁷ While older people still avoid bread, in many households, especially young households with children, bread has replaced traditional

⁶⁶ Packaged milk in India is mostly buffalo milk or a mix of buffalo and cow milk. There is no mention on the packet of the type of animal milk is sourced from.

⁶⁷ There are traditionally several restrictions on from whom a caste Hindu could accept food cooked or prepared with water as the base. The restrictions on food cooked with oil as the medium are less stringent.

unleavened bread at breakfast. It is toasted and served with jam and butter, both of which are bought from the market and are processed. Bread may also be served with boiled or scrambled eggs. If the household is more ‘modern’ and affluent, a sandwich maker may be available, in which case processed cheese is one of the main ingredients.⁶⁸ Bread is also often the main component of schoolchildren’s lunch boxes, where it is packed as sandwiches made with butter and cheese or jam. Cornflakes, floating in a bowl of lukewarm milk, are a common sight at the breakfast tables of westernised middle-class Indians. To these, the more health conscious have added muesli and oats in recent years.

The story of oats is interesting and offers insight into Indian food practices (Bapna, 2015; Chawla, 2015). Oats have been available in India as a breakfast option for some time. Quakers Oats was among the first to launch quick oats in the Indian market. However, most Indian consumers thought them gluggy and unappetising, until oats were repackaged as a health food with an Indian twist and made available in small, easy-to-use sachets. Now they come in various flavours, although the *masala* (spice) flavour is the most popular. While health is more of a concern today than ever before, at least for a section of the population, this concern ‘cannot take precedence over taste’. The north Indian attitude towards health is rather ambivalent. For example, the idea of portion size is nearly non-existent, with most eating until they can eat no more. Even if they want to stop eating earlier, the Indian concepts of feeding in general and hospitality in particular mean that the person serving would force another helping onto the plate of a protesting family member or guest.

3.6.2 Lunch and dinner: Flour, spices and condiments

Processed food is not altogether absent from the lunch and dinner table. Wheat flour and spices were, not so long ago, processed at home. As mentioned previously, wheat would be bought in bulk, cleaned and washed at home and then spread out on the terrace to dry. Once dry, it would be taken to the preferred miller who would grind the wheat into flour, which would be brought back and stored in large drums. Spices were bought whole and ground at home. Some women who grew up at a time when this was common practice continue to do so. In fact, the shift to packaged flour, important as a marker of change and a break in inertia, did not happen until the early 1990s. Today it is nearly complete.

⁶⁸ Natural cheese is rare in India, except the local cheese called *paneer*. This is partly because cheese is a relatively recent product and many people do not have a taste for it, and partly because the cold chains and storage facilities in India are not conducive to natural cheese.

Instrumental in this shift has been the breakdown of the joint family, smaller sized houses with limited space to process and store food, and the increased movement of women into professions or away from reproductive labour and into other pursuits such as dropping off and picking up children, and involvement in hobbies and schoolwork and activities of children. Even where houses can support the processing and storing of food, as in Sushant Lok, and women do not work or have young children, these activities are rarely pursued; indeed, they are looked down on as rustic, as something ‘my grandmother, an illiterate, rural woman, would do’ (Anoushka).

Processed foods also appear at the lunch table in the form of pickles, chutneys and packaged yogurt. Pickle making, once an important activity throughout the year given the seasonal availability of fruits and vegetables, has been outsourced to the market. Jars and bottles of different sizes, especially of lime, mango, chilli and mixed pickles, line shop shelves and sell quickly. While many households continue to make yogurt at home, young households in particular regularly buy packaged yogurt from the market. That this product is growing in popularity is evident from the wide variety of yogurt brands now commonly available in shops. Another product worth mentioning, given its cultural and culinary significance in Hindu households, is *ghee*, clarified butter.

3.6.3 Ghee

Ghee has immense ritual significance for Hindus. It is used in the holy fire, *Yajna*, as an offering to the Fire God Agni, and is one of the five ingredients of *Panchamrit* (five nectars), which Hindus offer their Gods. *Ghee* is also a key ingredient in many dishes and, until recently, along with mustard oil, was one of the two important cooking mediums used in north Indian Hindu households. Until a decade or two ago, *ghee* was made with great care at home from butter,⁶⁹ itself made from the cream that would accumulate on unhomogenised milk. These days, most households buy *ghee* from the market.

3.6.4 Evening snacks

Evening snacks are an important part of the everyday food practices of Indian households. They are served with tea when children return in the afternoon from school or after

⁶⁹ Buttermilk, a by-product of the process of making butter from cream, once an important everyday food item in north India, is now bought almost exclusively from the market, where it is available in poly and tetra packs.

playing and when the adults of the household return from work. These snacks, mostly roasted or fried savouries, used to be made at home in the evenings. At some point, they started to be purchased from local sweets shops. Local sweets shops still supply many evening snacks, especially those that have to be consumed hot and fresh, such as *kachori* and *samosa*; however, those that can be consumed over time are bought packaged from grocery stores, with the bulk of this market captured by two or three brands. Advances in packaging were instrumental in this change, but are only part of the story. As mentioned above regarding the structure of a meal, the targeting of products has been equally important in the success of snacks.

When Nestlé introduced Maggi instant noodles in India in the early 1980s, they advertised it as a modern snack that was quick, tasty and easy to cook (as opposed to readymade). It was not claimed, at least not initially and never directly, that Maggi noodles were a substitute for a meal. It was a ‘healthy’ snack that mothers could give their hungry, demanding kids at any time of the day while they continued attending to other business. This product offered convenience and taste for a low price:

They got the right start with the ‘Fast to Cook, Good to Eat’ campaign. Some of us were toddlers around the time this was on air. We wanted Maggi to be a mother’s ally. Give her a tasty snack she could whip up for her famished child in two minutes. (Bapna & Bhatt, 2014)

When Maggi noodles were banned in India in 2015 and Nestlé recalled the product due to a contamination scare, the value of the recalled noodles was estimated at over US\$50 million (The Guardian, 2015).

3.7 Meat and Eggs

3.7.1 Eggs

The rise in popularity of the humble egg has been nothing short of dazzling. Until recently, eggs were not allowed in vegetarian households, and their consumption in meat-eating households was limited by availability and disposable income. Today, the popularity of eggs can be gauged from their presence in most grocery stores. Egg sellers, selling fried and boiled eggs from pushcarts, are a common sight at street corners. Many people have eggs for breakfast, but may also consume them as egg curry for lunch or dinner, between meals on bread or a bun, as the popular street snack ‘egg roll’, on Maggi noodles or with drinks.

Many vegetarian households, which did not allow egg until recently, have started to consume eggs, especially if they have young children. In such households, it is common for the parents not to consume eggs but to give them to children to supplement protein and mineral intake. Often the rationale offered for the decision to give eggs to children is to endow children with enough flexibility in their food intake that they will not have to go hungry if they were to ever find themselves in a situation where vegetarian food is not available⁷⁰:

Table egg production [in India] is estimated to have increased from 30 billion eggs in 2000 to 66 billion eggs in 2012 with per capita egg consumption increasing from 28 to 55 eggs during that period ... Demand for table eggs has been increasing 5%–6% driven by increased domestic consumption. (Allirajani, 2013)

The meteoric rise in popularity of eggs can in part be explained by the modernisation, rationalisation and scaling up of the poultry industry on the supply side, which increased production while keeping the cost of production low. Eggs are thus one of the cheapest sources of protein; a dozen eggs costs less than a litre of milk. They are also easy and fast to cook and, unlike milk and many other food products, cannot be easily adulterated. Also they have a longer shelf life, even without refrigeration. Moreover, eggs are widely used in baked products such as cakes and pastries, which many non-egg eating Hindus do not mind consuming. This implies the tacit acceptance of egg consumption, or at least a less stubborn resistance to it. In families that take egg as part of baked goods, there is seldom opposition if the younger generation starts to consume eggs, although discretion may be advised, to avoid offending the larger family, especially the family elders.

Starting in the 1980s, the National Egg Coordination Committee ran an aggressive and effective advertising campaign to popularise eggs. Most north Indians would recall *Sunday Ho Ya Monday Roz Khao Ande* [Have eggs every day, whether Sunday or Monday]. In a later stage, this campaign used celebrities to appeal to young children and promote the virtue of eggs as a food product. This highly successful campaign made a lasting impression on both those who ate eggs and those who did not (as measured by the recall of the advertisement and its message), created awareness and, to a significant degree, forged an acceptance of eggs as a legitimate and desirable food product (Raghav, 2010).

⁷⁰ The reasoning goes somewhat like this: eggs may not be strictly vegetarian but they are not as bad as chicken or fish and they are available everywhere

Later the National Egg Coordination Committee used Mahatma Gandhi to promote eggs, a move that was poorly received (Foster, 2005). Those who opposed the use of Gandhi's name to promote eggs reasoned that Gandhi never ate eggs and so should not be used as the face of such a promotional campaign. However, the issue was not this simple. In 1942, Mahatma Gandhi wrote a monograph titled 'Key to Health', in which he said of eggs:

Eggs are regarded by the layman as a flesh food. In reality, they are not. Nowadays sterile eggs are also produced. The hen is not allowed to see the cock and yet it lays eggs. A sterile egg never evolves into a chick. Therefore, he who can take milk should have no objection to take sterile eggs. (cited in Damodaran, 2015)

This indeterminate status of eggs has facilitated their acceptance among people from non-meat eating backgrounds. No killing, blood or flesh is involved in eating eggs. Once this reasoning entered the popular consciousness and was accepted, the other factors listed above that made eggs appealing contributed to the spread of eggs as a popular food item, whether eaten boiled or wrapped in bread.

Of course, the rise in popularity of eggs has not been without opposition from individuals and institutions. Unanimous approval is not possible for any item of food in a culturally diverse country with a large population. As mentioned previously, the state of Madhya Pradesh banned the serving of eggs in midday meals at government-funded schools and *anganwadis* (early education centres) (Sharma, 2016). The states of Maharashtra, Delhi and Gujarat do not serve eggs at all in schools. Eggs are also not served in midday meals in the states of Rajasthan and Karnataka, where the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON)-run Akshaya Patra serves only strictly vegetarian food (Mohan, 2015). Most of the states serving eggs in schools are non-BJP states, Jharkhand being the only exception.⁷¹ It is hard not to conclude that:

[the party's] Hindutva ideology and related vegetarian dogma followed by upper-caste Hindus might be coming in the way of providing a cheap source of nutrition to deprived and malnourished children, whose cultural preferences would wholeheartedly welcome the opportunity to consume an egg. (Basu, 2016)

⁷¹ I flag the issue of political opposition to eggs here as I will later discuss in greater detail the theme of movement against meat in general and beef in particular by linking the protection of cow to the idea of patrolling and protecting the 'boundaries' of Hinduism from violation.

3.7.2 Meat in everyday food practices

What is the place of meat in everyday food practices in a north Indian Hindu household? The simple answer to that question is that in a north Indian Hindu household, there is very little space for meat in *everyday* food practices. Vegetarian food is not only more commonly consumed, it also continues to be implicitly regarded as the most desirable and appropriate food, even for those who consume meat.

This desirability is illustrated by the number of meat eaters who turn vegetarian as they age. While often saying this is because they can no longer digest meat, to which there may be some truth, when asked about their main motivation for making this change, they cite ‘doing the right thing’. It is also increasingly popular to become the disciple of a guru or join a religious sect and renounce meat and alcohol (discussed further in Chapter 4). The sense of undesirableness of meat consumption also comes across in the fact that most meat eaters do not eat meat on the days of the week associated with the Gods they worship, and in the manner in which meat-eating households explain or underplay their consumption of meat:

Lal Chacha (Chacha means ‘uncle’ and is used as a term of respect for an older man) explains meat eating in his family, a Brahmin family from the hills, as being an outcome of his family having served in the army of the local king and therefore being required to eat meat. I once accompanied Lal Chacha and his brother-in-law, another hill Brahmin, to a common friend’s house for lunch. The conversation veered towards food preferences and I asked this friend if anyone in her family ate meat. Before she could say anything, Lal Chacha’s brother-in-law commented ‘no one in her family eats meat; they are *asli* (real) Brahmins’.

Manoj, of the meat-eating Kshatriya caste, has been contemplating giving up meat for some time: ‘I have stopped drinking, stopped smoking and now I will give up meat. Then I shall become a saint’. While this might have been said in banter, it nevertheless suggests the belief that meat consumption and saintly conduct and status cannot go together. However, in spite of this explicit and implied privileging of vegetarian food many north Indian Hindu households consume meat regularly, often on designated day(s) of the week.

3.8 Everyday Food Practices and the Social World

3.8.1 Established practices and other practices

Documentation of the everyday food practices in Sushant Lok suggests a peripheral place for meat in these food practices. Meat may be a desired item of food, but everyday food is overwhelmingly vegetarian across various Hindu groups, irrespective of class or caste affiliation. Not only is the everyday food vegetarian, it is also marked by the centrality of cereal. In fact, it is the cereal, whether in the form of *chapatti* or cooked rice, that makes the meal. Whether for religious or economic reasons, or perhaps more out of the force of habit, based on my observations, the majority of Hindus favour vegetarian food in the everyday. This practice remains strongly embedded.

While there has been change, this has been confined to the periphery of everyday food practice. I discussed above the case of rapidly changing snack consumption. This is because snacks are not a ‘meal’ and exist at the periphery of everyday food practices. In the case of meals, breakfast is the meal that has changed the most over the years, and has been the site of the greatest experimentation with and absorption of the exotic:

Breakfast is the meal that gives Nivedhitha the flexibility to be creative. She could make poha, a flattened rice dish from western India or idli and sambhar, rice cakes and lentil soup from south India. She could also make the ‘traditional’ north Indian breakfast puri and sabzi, deep-fried bread and curried vegetables. Breakfast is also the most processed meal of the day. On most days breakfast is bread and butter and tea. Sometimes eggs are added to this mix. Cornflakes and milk could be breakfast on some days. Manoj may have only fruit for breakfast or he may have sprouts when trying to get fit or lose weight.

The structure of a meal, one stressed element (cereal) and one unstressed, is not always applicable to breakfast. Breakfast has an ambiguous status in north India; and like most things ambiguous, it is open to interpretation and reinvention⁷². Historically, when more people lived rural lives and left home early in the morning to tend to their fields or animals, there would have been little time to prepare or eat breakfast. Some would have eaten leftovers from an earlier meal, but many others would have eaten a combined breakfast and lunch later in the day. With urbanisation and an increase in office jobs, people would leave after having breakfast and carry lunch with them or, especially in

⁷² While breakfast is firmly established in most north Indian Hindu households, it is strictly speaking not a meal as evident from the term used to describe it. Breakfast is *nashta* –loosely translated to snack – while lunch and dinner are *khana* or *roti*.

small towns, come back home for lunch. As breakfast established itself, its lack of regimented practices made it an arena for experimentation, free from being encumbered by long-established food practices of the type associated with lunch and dinner. The entry of processed food such as bread into breakfast can be partly attributed to the fluid nature of practices around breakfast and partly to the fact that once breakfast became the norm, the early morning rush and paucity of time, especially in the urban context, favoured processed foods.

3.8.2 Everyday food practices as a metonym for the social world

If food is treated as a code, the message it encodes will be found in the patterns of social relations being expressed. The message is about different degrees of hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and transactions across the boundaries. (Douglas, 1972, p. 61)

In Sushant Lok, as elsewhere, everyday food practices reproduce and reinforce the social world from which they are derived and the social identities attached to them. Nivedhitha's role in the kitchen underlines the continuing gendered division of labour and power relations within the household where productive labour is more desirable than reproductive labour, such as cooking and cleaning. Gendered roles are also reinforced by economic roles; the provider of food is not the one to cook or serve it.

The relationship between the provision of food on the one hand and power and status on the other is not confined to the household alone. It permeates the world beyond. In the NGO office, it marks the boundaries of social relations; those close to Manoj participate in the NGO lunches and parties, while others are either not invited or stay away. Food marks and reflects the boundaries of in and out groups at the NGO. Within the in group, as the head of the office and metaphorical 'provider of employment and food', Manoj rarely enters the kitchen, whether to make tea or to cook a meal. When he does enter the kitchen, such as when meat is being cooked, it is as a combination of expert, supervisor and critic. In this role, he does not engage in the mundane task of chopping and stirring, but rather tastes and approves or disapproves, a role that reinforces his sense of self by placing him in a position to judge the efforts of others.

North Indian society was a patronage-driven society and in many ways continues to be so. Relations around food, the relationship with the greengrocer (a long-term personal relationship based on extension of patronage), the relationship with junior colleagues (where the senior is expected to pay for their food when eating together), and serving

food to a senior colleague are all examples in which patronage is extended and reciprocated, creating a clear hierarchy of power and status. In many ways, this is reminiscent of the *Jajmani* system, ‘a feudalistic system of prescribed, hereditary obligations of payment and of occupational and ceremonial duties between two or more specific families of different castes in the same locality’ (Beidelman, 1959, p. 6), which formed the basis of the economic structuring of life in Indian villages. What is interesting in this arrangement is that payment was often made in the form of food, mostly uncooked, and the client *jajman*, the giver of food as remuneration for services rendered, was considered superior to the provider of services, the *kameen*.

The everyday food practices in Sushant Lok suggest that despite the fast pace of change, the upbringing and social affiliations of the individual continue to play an important role in their everyday food practices. Food preferences are internalised over time and are central to societies’ understanding of themselves and their pasts (Connerton, 1989). Despite rapid urbanisation, global influences via media and mass movement of the population, everyday food remains rooted in regional and caste-based culinary practices, influenced by the traditional Indian medical science of *Ayurveda*. Caste-based identities, regional identities and class are all expressed by exhibiting preference for certain food practices while rejecting others as undesirable or inferior.

To a wheat-eating household from western Uttar Pradesh, the cooking and consumption of rice without draining the starch, where the grains of rice stick together, is a sign of poverty and lack of sophistication in cooking, whereas to a rice-eating household from eastern Uttar Pradesh, removing the starch from rice such that the cooked grains separate instead of sticking together shows a lack of appreciation for the real taste of rice.

Continuing resistance to the incorporation of regional food dishes in the main meals of lunch and dinner suggests a desire to maintain continuity with past practices; that is, a desire to keep whole, through everyday food practices, the social world that was once inhabited:

It is probably in tastes in food that one would find the strongest and most indelible mark of infant learning, the lessons which longest withstand the distancing and collapse of the native world and most durably maintain nostalgia for it. (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 79)

Continuing on the same point, returning to Gandhi and his position on eggs, one could ask why the Mahatma did not eat eggs considering he did not distinguish between eggs

and milk, such that if one could drink milk, they could also have eggs. Gandhi (1927/1993) answers this question in his autobiography, *My Experiments with Truth*:

My mother's interpretation of meat was the only true one for me and not the one my wider experience or my pride of better knowledge might have taught me. (ch. 17)

CHAPTER 4: PRACTICES OF MEAT CONSUMPTION

Despite everyday food practice being vegetarian, a large percentage of the population in India consumes meat. One survey puts India's vegetarian population at just over 30 per cent (Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, 2006). However, irrespective of whether one eats meat or not, there is a place for meat in the food practices of every household. After all, avoidance of meat is also a food practice that concerns meat. Given its ritual and symbolic importance in the north Indian Hindu context, meat consumption or avoidance not only signals something about the identity of individuals but also the nature of the occasion being marked or observed.

In this chapter, I explore the practices of meat consumption and how they have changed. I divide the consumption of meat into two broad categories: consumption of meat at home and consumption of meat outside the home. While these two areas of consumption differ, the thematic areas covered often overlap: meat and hospitality, meat and masculinity, meat and celebration, the association between meat and alcohol, changing meat preferences, and change and continuity in general. Where possible, I also investigate the likely reasons behind the continuity or change. In examining the practices of meat consumption, I conceptualise consumption as a set of stages, starting from the purchase of meat, through to its storage, processing, cooking and consumption.

As described in Chapter 1, Crotty (1993) emphasises the need to examine and understand food choices by looking at both the pre- and post-swallowing worlds of food and food practices. The pre-swallowing world refers to the social and cultural influences on food and eating, while the post-swallowing world centres on the nutritional aspects of eating such as calories, protein, fats, carbohydrates and whether a diet is balanced. In this sense, for most north Indian Hindus who eat meat, its consumption is insignificant when viewed from the perspective of nutrition or the post-swallowing world, but assumes great significance and acquires layers of meanings when viewed through the lens of the pre-swallowing world. This latter lens considers what it *means* to consume meat and the role of meat consumption in the identity formation of north Indian Hindus and its signalling to oneself and to others. By looking at the everyday practices around the consumption or avoidance of something as symbolic in the north Indian Hindu context as meat, we can better understand the continuity and change in these practices, as well as the participants' creation and re-creation of their social and cultural identities.

4.1 Caste and Regional Affiliations

Who consumes meat and who does not, what kind of meat is consumed and what kind is avoided, and how and when is meat consumed are all aspects of meat consumption influenced by caste and regional affiliation. Bengalis eat fish, Kashmiris prefer sheep's meat and Nepalis are fond of pork. Similarly, north Indian Brahmins often do not eat meat, while Bengali Brahmins do. As described in Chapter 3, Lal Chacha, a Brahmin by caste, explains his family's meat consumption by citing the prevalence of meat eating among the hill Brahmins. Yet, his brother-in-law, also a hill Brahmin, refers to a common friend as a 'true Brahmin' because she is a strict vegetarian. When Lal Chacha's attention is drawn to others of his own sub-caste who are strict vegetarians, he refers to the martial tradition of his forefathers, who were 'officers in the army of the local Raja', to explain the practice of meat consumption in his family in particular. The common theme of meat as a signifier of identity is also noted by other participant households:

Madhvan's slogan *jisne nahi khaya suara woh nahin Hindu poorā* [one who has not eaten pig is not a complete Hindu] defines the Hindu identity as opposite to the Muslim other, pig's meat being prohibited in the Muslim food discourse. To Nivedhitha, 'growing up, meat was a natural choice' as she was born into a Rajput (Kshatriya) caste household. While meat eaters themselves, many of Gautam's friends cannot reconcile themselves to the fact that Gautam, a Jain, could eat meat. 'What kind of a Jain is he?' they are often heard wondering.

In this context, each group frequently attempts to extol the virtues of their food practices while critiquing the practices of others. The vegetarians, for example, extol the *satvik* properties of vegetarian food. Dr Mehta often explains why vegetarian food is the natural food of humans and why consumption of meat is an 'abomination', leading to negative physical, mental and spiritual outcomes. Indeed, this is the basis of the food hierarchy in which *satvik* (pure and simple), *rajsik* (rich and indulgent) and *tamsik* (dark and impure), each associated with a caste group, reinforce the caste hierarchy.

Those who eat meat, such as Lal Chacha, dismiss vegetarian food as *ghas phoos* (fodder). They attribute masculinity, hospitality and openness of character to meat eaters, and frailty, lack of courage and guile to vegetarians. At the same time, surprise at deviations from group norms (such as in the case of a Jain who eats meat) indicates an expectation that members of a group will adhere to their respective group's food practices, thereby maintaining the group distinctions underpinned by these everyday practices.

While consumption of meat or its avoidance continues to be explained by caste and regional associations—both by the respondents and the academic literature—other identities and motivations are gradually being invoked to explain the consumption or avoidance of meat:

Anil Pande and his wife are both vegetarian. It was not a choice or a conscious decision; they were born into Brahmin vegetarian households from the plains of western Uttar Pradesh and grew up seeing vegetarianism as the norm. Their 11-year-old son, however, enjoys going to KFC where his dish of choice is spicy chicken nuggets. He is also fond of eating chicken burgers at McDonald's. While the Pandes do not cook meat at home, they do not mind if their son has chicken on the occasional outing. The Pandes feel that the dietary restrictions that they grew up with constrained them in their food choices. These constraints often made the Pandes appear 'stupid and backward' in social gatherings, especially those in which people consumed alcohol and meat. They do not want their son to suffer the same handicap. Moreover, 'who knows where his [their son's] destiny will take him tomorrow. What if he finds himself in a place where vegetarian food is not available? If he is exposed to meat, at least he will not starve'.

In this emergent discourse, food practices are not solely inherited from being born into a community and internalised through socialisation, they are also reflexive strategic choices related to how one sees oneself and wants others to see them.

4.2 Meat at Home—Sunday Lunch and Masculine Spaces

Govind recalled a time when the preparation of meat was an event, a much-awaited celebration that involved all family members in some capacity, special as much for the food as for the atmosphere of festivity it created. Those days were now long gone; meat no longer created an environment of festivity. He was responding to Manoj's remark that chicken had acquired the status of potato, a reference to the banal status of chicken as a food item, similar to potato because of its ubiquity. While Govind and Manoj's lament was not entirely without basis, it had a clear note of exaggeration in it.

Agreeing with Manoj, Govind started reminiscing about the days of his childhood and adolescence, when Sunday lunch was centred on meat, especially when his father was at home. On such days, if male guests were expected, it was certain that there would be meat for lunch.⁷³ This was true to varying extents for all meat-eating middle-class households.

⁷³ Given the close association of meat with men and masculinity and its centrality to hospitality in meat-eating households, in the patriarchal society of north Indian Hindus meat was cooked in meat-

Sunday was the weekly holiday for the head of the household, a day that also marked a break from the humdrum of life. Meat for lunch symbolised this break by hyphenating an otherwise vegetarian food practice. On Sundays, lunch was the most important meal of the day, and the meat preparation the most important dish of the meal. Lunch would be followed by an afternoon siesta, which in turn was followed by preparations for the week ahead. If the household had a television, they would also watch a Sunday evening movie on *Door Darshan*, the state broadcaster and the only TV channel.

In the morning, the father, alone or accompanied by his son(s), would go out to shop for the ingredients for lunch. The most important stop would be at the trusted butcher's shop, where mutton would be bought after much discussion with the butcher—the part was chosen, the carcass brought down and a chunk hewn off before being chopped into smaller pieces. Buying meat was the prerogative of the male head of the family, although son(s) could accompany him to learn the 'fine skills' involved in selecting the right cut. Mr Rathour, a Kshatriya from the hills, remembers how he would accompany his father, an infantry officer, to the butchers around the various cantonments in which they lived. His father, being an officer, always had a *sahayak* (orderly) to run errands for him, but he undertook the 'serious' task of buying meat for Sunday lunch himself:

In Tejpur, Assam we were in a remote part with the only nearby market being the weekly *haat* (rural market). I would accompany my father to the *haat* but as there were no butchers we would buy a chicken, which I would slaughter at home with a long knife. The decapitated chicken would be placed under a large pan where its headless body would violently and repeatedly crash against the sides of the pan. The inside of the pan would be covered with blood but it helped avoid the mess that would otherwise result.

Once back home, the preparation of meat would be a family affair, closely monitored by the father. Someone would chop onion and garlic, another person would make a paste of ginger, coriander and green chillies, while a third person would wash the meat as the music from a radio station or cassette player played in the background. The father would taste the dish repeatedly as it cooked until he was satisfied that justice had been done. Lunch would then be served, with the father being given the best pieces and the largest quantity of meat, along with other preparations. The meat preparation would be savoured in an affected and deliberate manner, the quality of meat and that of the preparation would

eating households when male guests visited but was not considered essential to hospitality when female guests visited.

be commented upon at repeated intervals while the rest of the meal would fade into the background.

In essence, this has not changed for a large section of the population; while increased prosperity might have changed the outward appearances of the consumption of meat in middle-class households, meat continues to retain its special place in the culinary calendar of these households. It continues to be cooked on weekends and holidays for a change of taste, as a treat or a special meal, and to mark a break from the monotony of everyday vegetarian food practice. Sanjiv, a friend of Govind's and a Punjabi who grew up in the nearby hill town of Mussorie, once, very aptly, called it a 'circuit-breaker'. The cooking and consumption of meat at home is an event planned in great detail. Rarely is it a spontaneous act of consumption.

4.2.1 Butchers, masculine spaces and the promise of the supermarket

Raw meat is rarely stored in the refrigerator for more than a few hours, the usual practice being to purchase meat fresh from the butcher on the day it is to be cooked. The transaction involves more than just picking up a pack off a shelf in a supermarket. Meat shops around Sushant Lok, and in Dehradun more generally, are mostly squalid, unhygienic, run down places that look uninviting to the bravest. The process of purchasing chicken could involve selecting a live chicken from amongst many in an overcrowded cage –a box with wire mesh to be precise-, which the butcher then takes to the back of the shop, slaughters, chops into pieces and then packs in a plastic bag, the meat still warm to touch. In the case of goat, the normal practice is to point to the desired part of a hanging carcass, which the butcher cuts into small pieces in front of the customer. However, goats tied outside butcher shops, feeding on straw and grain, are also a common sight. One does not have to strain one's imagination to visualise where they would end up.

Meat from a butcher is mostly bought as meat on the bone cut to varying sizes, the most common size being 1 to 2 inches. While the exact quantity bought would depend on the number of people being catered to and the type of meat being cooked, the most commonly bought quantity is a kilogram. Meat is put straight into a black plastic bag, sometimes double bagged, and handed to the customer. Fresh ingredients to go into the dish such as ginger, green chillies and fresh coriander are purchased along the way as the customer heads home.

The masculine nature of meat consumption is evident at every stage of this business, starting from the slaughtering of the animal and its transportation to its purchase and onwards. The purchase of meat is a male prerogative except in certain more egalitarian communities, such as the Nepali population of Dehradun, especially in the Nepali-dominated neighbourhoods of Garhi cantonment and surrounding areas. When, in the course of a conversation, I asked Anoushka and her female friend and colleague how often they consumed meat, Anoushka's expression conveyed amusement at my question: 'where could I, a single woman buy meat? Have you ever seen a woman buy meat in a meat shop?'.

Historically, public spaces in India have been masculine spaces. While the safety of women was a concern and continues to be so, an equally strong—and related—factor was the notion of family respectability. Given the restrictions on the mobility of women and strong association between respectability and *purdah*, market transactions were conducted by the males of the household or by servants.⁷⁴ Women would go to the market very rarely, in a group, and only to markets that specialised in products for women such as clothing or jewellery. This is why many old cities of India have markets that specialise in products and services for women. This situation started to change when women began to step out of homes for education and jobs. However, even today girls and women from 'respectable' families often limit their time spent in public spaces to the minimum necessary for work, education and the occasional visit to a temple.

Visitors from western cultures are struck by the preponderance of men in the streets and at markets. This is especially true for small cities and provincial towns. While times may have changed, there are certain spaces in which one would rarely see women, especially in a small town. A bar is a masculine space, as is an alcohol shop. It is very unlikely that one would see a woman buying alcohol or cigarettes. Public smoking among women is largely confined to women labourers, who can often be seen squatting around work sites smoking *bidis* (tobacco rolled in a *tendu* leaf). Meat shops fall into this same category of spaces in which women should not be seen. Moreover, women avoid entering meat shops because of the social environment in and around the shops, including people of 'rough appearance', and the unclean surroundings and dark interiors of meat shops. There is also

⁷⁴ Markets were considered places of vice to be avoided even by men from respectable families.

the fear that being seen in a meat shop may not be favourable to their image and reputation. The last point is elaborated upon later in this chapter.

Women may not go to a butcher to buy meat, but new kinds of shops are emerging that promise a more refined and less gory meat-buying experience. These include boutique meat outlets such as Green Chick (supplying mostly chicken products, as the name suggest) in Delhi or high-end supermarkets such as Le Marche and Spencer's, also in Delhi. In Dehradun, there are few such options. The Central on Rajpur Road sells cold cuts, ready to cook kebabs and other meat items along with seasoning, dressings and some regular grocery items. In recent years, Easy Day, a supermarket chain with outlets in many cities, has opened four outlets in Dehradun. Two of these are within one and a half kilometres of Sushant Lok. Both sell meat.

For women such as Anoushka, who have stepped out of their homes and are living on their own, supermarkets like Easy Day are safe public spaces that offer an opportunity to buy meat without being noticed, judged, commented upon or feeling uncomfortable. These stores are in respectable and safe areas, are well lit and air-conditioned, are serviced by uniformed and reasonably trained staff, meet most kitchen needs under one roof, and preserve the anonymity of the customer. Meat is sold in a separate section, displayed in refrigerated glass shelves, ready to be weighed and packed. There is a strong emphasis on hygiene, noticeable in the presence of flycatchers, sanitised floors, the fragrance of disinfectant in the air, and the use of gloves and tongs by members of staff. The contrast with the local butcher shop could not be starker. Supermarkets like Easy Day offer a 'hassle free' shopping experience, which is the reason for their growing popularity both with single women and with many other sections of the population.

Married middle-class housewives shop for meat in stores like Easy Day for similar reasons to those discussed above. Many men do too. Manoj is one of them. He does not like going to the local meat shop to buy meat. He finds the shops unclean and the sight of meat bothers him. So conflicted is Manoj's relationship with meat that while he enjoys cooking and eating it, he cannot touch raw meat even to take it out of the packet. Whenever possible, he asks Govind or Bahadur to get meat when it is needed at home. When this is not possible and he has to buy meat, Manoj drives to Easy Day. He walks to the meat section and quickly places his order. The meat is weighed, priced, put in a plastic packet and handed to him. He quickly walks out of the meat section. He does not have to

point out which chicken he would like to buy, or wait for it to be slaughtered and cut up for him, as he would have to in an ordinary butcher shop.

In choosing to buy meat from Easy Day as opposed to the local butcher, one is signalling a certain status and managing the perceived risk associated with food at the same time. In an age marked by growing anxieties about adulteration and impurities in food, there is a growing perception that small businesses such as local dairies and butchers cannot be relied upon to supply unadulterated and hygienic quality products. Big businesses, selling packaged products handled and sold in a manner that shows professionalism and concern for the health of customers, and which are believed to have better systems in place (e.g., cold stores and cold chains), are considered more worthy of trust.⁷⁵ Adulteration and lack of cleanliness and hygiene in food have increasingly become issues of concern for the middle class, such that when people have the option and can afford to buy packaged products, they do so. Moreover, alongside their convenience and the benefits they provide in managing the risks associated with food, packaged food items also signal class and status in procurement and consumption. This is evident in the increasing use of processed and packaged food, especially when guests are being entertained.

The best possible food is *desi* (native or local strains or breeds) food—*desi* chicken, *desi* eggs, *desi* tomatoes and so on, but only when procured from a village source. The best food comes from the villages, while everything in cities is adulterated. This shows the uneasy relationship with urban spaces that urban dwellers in India, many of who are first or second generation urban dwellers, have. The village is romanticised as a landscape of purity, while the city is endured (Nandy, 2001; Ray, 2015).

A product category that is starting to establish itself in the market is processed and packaged vegetarian and meat items. Cocktail sausages, chicken nuggets, chicken burgers and kebabs of various kinds are commonly available. These ‘heat and eat’ products have the potential to effect the consumption of meat at the household level. They do not require elaborate planning to purchase and cook thereby enabling spontaneous or impulse consumption of meat. They can also be stored and used as snacks for guests before dinner or with drinks, especially when an unannounced guest arrives, or for an impromptu party.

⁷⁵ This is despite the fact that the products of big businesses have often been found not to meet the food safety standards. In a recent well-known case (already mentioned in Chapter 3), Maggie, a market leader instant noodle from Nestle, was banned in India after it was tested and found to contain lead in excess of the government-specified limit.

Single women can buy these frozen products from a supermarket without any concerns about their public image and use them at their convenience. As far as meat consumption at home is concerned, these products open a ‘world of possibilities’ by changing the type of meat consumed, the manner in which it is bought, and when and how often it is consumed.

Apart from the packaging and processing of these products, their nature is changed by virtue of not being sold at a butcher’s shop. Further, new products, even when made from previously stigmatised products, may not have the same stigma attached to them because, being new and foreign, they are difficult to place among the prevalent norms of acceptable and unacceptable (Donner, 2011). Students living away from home and with limited cooking skills and kitchen facilities could use these products to supplement and add variety to their food intake. These products could also be consumed in rented accommodation that does not allow meat to be cooked, as the meat in the product is not raw. Little or no cooking also minimises the smell of meat being cooked, which is strong and offensive to many vegetarians.⁷⁶

As evident from the above paragraphs, there is much recommending processed frozen meat products; however, the growth of the market is constrained by certain factors. Price is an issue, as the market is highly price sensitive; many Indian customers will change their product choices for even small differences in price. Another constraint, mentioned previously, is that the freezers in most household refrigerators are quite small, with limited space for packets of frozen food. Electricity supply in India is also erratic. Hour-long power cuts are not uncommon even in large cities, especially in the summer months when demand for electricity far outstrips supply. In this context, having frozen food in the refrigerator is not without risk. Finally, most middle-class households in India do not have ovens in their kitchens. This means that the frozen meat products have to be fried. The established dietary wisdom in the Indian middle class is that oil is a major contributing factor to lifestyle health problems, especially obesity, hypertension and cardiovascular disease. Deep-fried food is singled out as particularly bad. At a time when the middle class, the section of the population that can afford to consume frozen processed

⁷⁶ Many vegetarian landlords lay down the cooking of vegetarian food as a pre-condition for tenancy, as is the case with Anoushka’s landlord. This term of contract is seriously enforced by the landlord. Its violation can lead to the termination of the contract and eviction.

meat products, is beset with increasing anxieties about health, these concerns place a constraint on the market for these products.

4.2.2 Changing fortunes—The rise of chicken

Given the inland location of Dehradun, fish and seafood are not easily available or commonly consumed. Goat's meat and chicken are the most popular types of meat. In the households that have a tradition of cooking and eating meat at home goat's meat is the stated meat of choice for Sunday lunch; and when it is cooked, its preparation and consumption are accompanied by great fanfare.

Until recently, goat's meat was both more readily available and cheaper than chicken. While goats were raised for the market and had a ready supply chain, chickens were reared in small numbers for household consumption of eggs and poultry, and were mostly of local variety. As such, there was not a regular supply of chicken or an organised market for it. This meant that chicken was difficult to procure and much more expensive than goat's meat. In a price-sensitive market, the issue was settled in favour of goat's meat.

The relative pricing of chicken and goat's meat was reversed as the rationalisation and modernisation of the poultry industry increased the supply of chicken and brought down its price. This, coupled with the increase in the price of goat's meat—today it is at least twice as expensive as chicken—and concerns about the impact of red meat on health, depressed the demand for goat's meat. However, it seems that the tide is turning again towards red meat (see Jourdan & Harb, 2015; Pish, 2012; Rami, 2015; Sawanti, 2015).

Today, despite the often-expressed preference for goat's meat, especially by 'meat lovers' and 'traditional meat eaters', it is chicken that is cooked and consumed more often. A USAID report (Sasidhar & Suvedi, 2015) puts India as the fourth largest producer of poultry meat in the world⁷⁷ and growing at over 11 per cent per year. India is also the third largest producer of eggs in the world. Together, the poultry sector accounts for US\$10 billion per year and employs 6.5 million people (Sasidhar & Suvedi, 2015). Nor is India unique in witnessing the emergence of chicken as the meat of choice. The demand for chicken has surged globally, even in countries where lamb or beef was traditionally the meat of choice. In 2011–12, the average Australian consumed 44.6 kilograms of

⁷⁷ Some sources place India as the fifth largest producer of poultry meat, behind China, the United States, Indonesia and Brazil.

chicken, as compared to 32.8 kilograms of beef and 9.5 kilograms of lamb (Australian Food News, 2013). As Subramaniam et al. (2014) explain:

The preference and consumption of chicken meat can be considered as a universal phenomenon and chicken meat is greatly accepted by consumers worldwide as compared to the other meat consumption. The increase of chicken meat consumption is due to the versatility of the meat, relatively low cost in comparison to other meat, the acceptance of the chicken meat to all religions and increase in the household income. (pp. 512–513)

There is little analysis of the rise of chicken as the meat of choice in India. However, the phenomenon is not surprising. The poultry industry in India has grown rapidly over the last three decades. Prior to this, poultry was kept by households to meet domestic requirements for meat and eggs. While the surplus was sold in the market, it was minimal. In other words, poultry were reared only in a subsistence manner. Where poultry farms did exist, they sat on the outskirts of large towns and cities, catering to the demand in the adjoining urban area, and were small by today's standards.

Today, poultry rearing continues at the household level and is, in fact, a major point of intervention for both government agencies and NGOs, to supplement the household income of poor and rural households by providing them with an additional income-generating activity.⁷⁸ This activity is attractive because it requires very little space and time, the initial investment is small, the gestation period is short, transportation to market is easy and inexpensive, and there is a ready market for the product. However, major changes to poultry rearing have taken place at the level of large, commercially run poultry farms and vertically integrated poultry enterprises, which account for over 80 per cent of the total output of the poultry sector (Hellin et al., 2015). Their growth was, in many ways, facilitated by the launch of the All India Poultry Development Programme during the second Five Year Plan (1956–1961),⁷⁹ which laid the foundation for the development of the modern poultry sector in the country. According to a USAID report on the poultry sector in India, the main reasons for the growth of the sector include:

Modernization of production practices; import of pure lines/grandparent stock; least-cost feed formulation; vaccines against major diseases; provision of EAS

⁷⁸ Where poultry rearing is socially acceptable. There are instances, including in the hills surrounding Dehradun, where while a caste Hindu household may eat chicken and eggs, the rearing of poultry has a social stigma attached to it.

⁷⁹ After independence, India adopted socialism and a mixed economy, guided by five years plans in which the central government set the priorities for, and allocated resources to, various sectors of the economy in keeping with centrally determined national priorities.

[extension of agricultural services] and other input services; improved quality breeder management; developments in poultry processing; and private sector partnerships through CBF. (Sasidhar & Suvedi, 2015, p. 7)

While these factors have certainly played an important role in establishing and nurturing the poultry sector, an important factor in its growth and increased competitiveness is the low cost of feed. The main feed used in the poultry sector in India is maize. According to Hellin et al. (2015):

In India, the growth of the poultry industry has been facilitated by a concomitant surge in domestic maize production (Dixon et al. 2008). Between year 2000 and 2010, the domestic poultry sector in India grew by 141.7%, whereas the maize grain production increased by 93.4%. (p. 154)

On the demand side, the increase in disposable income has enabled people to buy more chicken and eggs, and the low price of chicken has helped to increase its popularity. However, the increase in demand is also culturally mediated.

4.2.2.1 Chicken—The culturally acceptable choice

Unlike some other meats, chicken is culturally acceptable to both Hindus and Muslims, the two main religious groups in India. In particular, beef is sacred to Hindus and Muslims are prohibited from eating pork. According to Donner (2008), many Hindus in Bengal also avoid goat's meat because of its close association with Muslims. Further, chicken is generally considered less chewy and gamey than other meats and is therefore more palatable for those who do not like a strong taste of meat or its texture. For this reason, chicken is normally the meat of choice for those who have recently started to eat meat or do not come from a meat-eating tradition. This also explains why those who come from a meat-eating tradition have started to distinguish 'real' meat eaters from those who until recently were vegetarian on the basis of meat preference: a 'real' meat eater prefers goat's meat, while a new convert eats chicken. A disaggregation within the category of meat eaters is thereby created.

An important factor in the increased popularity of chicken has been its normalisation over time. As outlined in Chapter 3, the push during the 1980s to increase people's intake of eggs to improve nutrition resulted in a popular campaign to encourage people to eat eggs. A number of vegetarian households who had, hitherto, considered eggs and chicken to fall into the category of meat, now started to give eggs to their children. Soon, eggs became a standard food item in many such households. For these children, it was

relatively easy to take the next step from egg to chicken. Further facilitating this shift was the arrival of quick service restaurants, such as McDonald's and its local variants, and the fast food products they offer. Ease of cooking also weighed in favour of chicken. Chicken can be cooked much faster (30 minutes in a pan, or 20 minutes in a pressure cooker) than can goat's meat, thus consuming less cooking fuel and saving time. Finally, as mentioned above, the negative press on red meat and its association with various health problems also contributed to the decline in the popularity of goat's meat and increase in the demand for chicken.

4.2.3 Preparing and consuming meat

4.2.3.1 Who cooks?

Cooking in a north Indian Hindu household is the responsibility of women; however, the cooking of meat is an exception to this arrangement. In most households, meat is cooked either by men or with their active involvement, and is a slow process that is savoured as much as the meat itself. This involves the male head of the household standing at the stove and issuing instructions to other family members to cut and chop, get salt and spices, and assist in whatever other ways necessary. When men take the lead in cooking, their wives normally withdraw from the kitchen, leaving the space to the men. However, they and the children are at hand should help be needed. If the men are not cooking themselves, the preparation is brought to them frequently for tasting. If they are not satisfied, they would instruct on what needs to be done; for example, 'add salt, a bit more chilli, some ginger and coriander leaf, simmer a little longer' (Lal Chacha) and so on. The cooking of the meat is complete only when the male head of the household is satisfied with the preparation.

The most commonly cooked type of meat dish is a gravy-based dish with small pieces of meat on the bone. It makes liberal use of spices and onion, garlic, ginger and chillies. While ginger-garlic paste, tomato puree and ready-to-use spices are available in the market, most households use fresh, home-prepared pastes and purees. Packaged pastes and purees are quite expensive and are believed not to have the same fragrance and flavour. Most middle-class households have, however, moved away from the *sil batta* (Indian version of pestle and mortar) to mixers and blenders to make pastes and purees. Yet while the ingredients and processing techniques may have changed with the times, commonly cooked recipes have remained more or less the same, despite the proliferation of cookbooks and cooking shows on television. People's tastes are set for now,

uncommon ingredients are not readily available or are expensive, and specialised equipment is hard to find. Most kitchens do not have an oven or grill. Where equipment such as an oven is available, using it is time consuming and people do not have the skill to use the equipment.

Cooking is still primarily learned by people at home through observing and assisting. Much pride goes into cooking one's 'own food' well, whether regional or caste-based. The need for experimentation is rarely felt. The best preparation is one that does not deviate from previous preparations and calls to mind meals eaten all of one's life. Experimentation is acceptable for 'snacks', such as Maggi noodles or Chinese chilli chicken, but not for meals. Of course, there are exceptions, as is often the case.

While single-pot chicken meat curries are the norm, travel cookbooks, cooking shows on television and restaurants serving foreign cuisines have alerted a few of the more adventurous and affluent members of the population to other types of meat preparations, which they try to replicate at home. Often, such preparations require boneless meat, certain parts of meat or finely minced meat. In such situations, stores like Easy Day and Central are the shops of choice. Donner (2008) notes:

Arambhag began selling frozen chicken parts ... Whole chickens are fine for cooking Bengali food, but many 'foreign' dishes which the aspiring middle classes here as elsewhere desire require only chicken legs or breasts ... Furthermore, Arambhag stores are seen as more hygienic than the stalls of the local vendors in the markets, who slaughter their birds in front of their customers. (p. 155)

Often, young men take the lead in experimenting with new recipes. This is partly because they are not skilled in cooking their everyday food and partly because cooking by such men is often for leisure and display. However, experimentation is not too radical and generally involves either a version of the common recipes cooked at home or the cooking of a dish, which may not be cooked at home but is still familiar. Often, such cooking is for friends rather than family and relatives. Here cooking assumes a tone of festivity. It becomes a means of relaxation and male bonding and a skill to impress friends with.

The methods of cooking and utensils used to cook meat have not changed much over the years. The pressure cooker and *kadai* (wok) continue to be the utensils of choice, while cooking mostly takes place on a stovetop connected to an LPG cylinder. However, urban living and other social changes have forced a few changes in the cooking of meat, particularly in terms of the site of cooking and utensils used to cook meat.

When people lived in the more traditional joint households, it was often the case that some members of the extended household, especially the elderly and some women, did not eat meat and avoided any contact with it. To them, meat was polluting and so the practice was to cook meat outdoors or in a separate cooking area inside the house using a stove and utensils set aside for cooking only meat. Meat would also be served in dishes set aside for this purpose and consumed either in an area designated for meat or there would be areas of the house where meat would not be allowed. The dishes would be washed separately and put away in a dedicated storage area. The cooking area and stove would be cleaned and covered until needed again to cook meat. It is unlikely that any meat would have been stored in such an arrangement. Instead, the preparation would have been shared with neighbours and relatives.

Manoj's parents live in a joint household in their native village. Even though Manoj's extended family—including his grandparents—consume(d) meat, neither of Manoj's parents eat meat. In their village house, meat is still cooked outdoors and on a separate stove (*chulah*). Other practices of separating meat from other food listed above are also observed.

Life in urban areas with attendant constraints on living space and amenities means that the practice of removing the cooking and consumption of meat from the cooking and consumption of other food is no longer possible and/or practiced in meat-eating households.

When Manoj's parents visit Manoj, the dishes in which meat is cooked are stored away, and meat is neither cooked at home nor brought cooked from outside. However, because of the paucity of space the same stove and the same kitchen that were used to cook meat are now converted to a vegetarian kitchen. Manoj does not tell his parents that the same stove and kitchen were used to cook meat and they, in turn, do not ask.

While some households, such as Manoj's, may continue to maintain a degree of separation in cooking meat, many others, such as Mr Rathour's, do not observe such practices. Separation is expensive and tedious. Both his parents, who live with Mr Rathour, eat meat, and the family does not have to deal with relatives to whom these issues and practices matter. More generally, the dilution of the practice of separation of meat from the regular kitchen is a result of the relaxation of the rules around pollution, itself a result of changes stemming from the larger socio-economic shifts accompanying the market economy, and the movement of people and urbanisation, as described in the preceding chapters. Urban living has made it increasingly difficult to observe restrictions

on commensality, cooks, and cooking methods. Eating outside becomes unavoidable, and in so doing ritual boundaries around eating cease to be inviolable. It is a thin line that becomes less restrictive each time it is crossed.

4.2.3.2 Consumption of meat

A kilogram of meat on the bone cooked as a gravy dish, the most common meat preparation, is considered adequate for five to six persons. In most meat-eating households not only is meat consumed infrequently, it is also consumed in small quantities. This may also explain why gravy-based preparations of meat are the most common—a smaller amount of meat can feed more people in gravy than the same quantity of meat in a dry preparation such as *tandoori* chicken or chicken *tikka*. When meat is cooked, few other main dishes are prepared. It is consumed mainly with rice, yogurt and a salad. When other dishes are prepared along with a meat dish, few meat eaters would choose to eat them; the only constraint on their appetite for meat tends to be the quantity of it on the table.

Gravy-based meat dishes accompanied by rice are eaten using hands, usually only the right hand. This is the traditional Indian way of eating. To many Indians, food does not taste the same when eaten with a spoon or a fork as when eaten with hands alone. While dining tables are used in many middle-class households, when guests are visiting and furniture is in short supply, a small table is placed in front of the most important diners—the man of the house and the male guests—while others are left to find a place for themselves and use their laps as a table. While most households use steel or melamine plates for everyday consumption, glass dinnerware is used for visiting guests, especially important guests. At such times, spoons are often used. Forks have come to enjoy greater use and recognition in response to new types of food such as pasta. For the more modern and affluent, who try the occasional boneless preparations, the use of knife and fork is not altogether alien.

In a traditional setting, adult males would be the first to be served, followed by children, especially male children. The women of the house were the last to eat. If there were guests, adult male guests would be served alongside the adult males of the house. The best portion of the meat would be served to the head of the household, other adult males of the household and male guests. Children would be next in precedence, while the women, if they ate meat at all, would normally eat the food leftover after serving others, often just gravy.

This traditional arrangement has not changed much. Even if domestic help is available in the kitchen, the women and girls of the house are expected to ensure that the meal progresses smoothly, and that other members of the household and guests are attended to properly. In such cases, the women of the house may join towards the end of the meal or after the men and children have finished eating.

Two days before *Holi* Lal Chacha's friend Nandu invited him over for dinner. Goat's meat was on the menu. As Nandu lives far from Sushant Lok, Lal Chacha asked me to accompany him. Nandu is a clerical staff member of a state government department. Originally from eastern Uttar Pradesh, Nandu has lived for many years in Dehradun with his wife and now grown up but unmarried son and daughter. He has built a small house in a neighbourhood, which was, not so long back, on the outskirts of Dehradun. The signs of its assimilation into the city proper are evident in a recently improved road leading to it and construction activity in and around it. However, one has to park the car a good 200 metres from Nandu's house. The house is in a narrow lane, which—though respectable—appears not to have benefitted greatly from the recent flush of prosperity, the signs of which are evident in everything around from new cars to ubiquitous construction.

Lal Chacha carried his own alcohol (whisky) from which he poured himself a drink and one for Nandu. Nandu muttered something about his wife being upset about drinking before downing his drink in a gulp. He then shouted instructions to the kitchen to send some *namkeen* (savoury snacks) to accompany the drink. His son⁸⁰ brought out a plate of *namkeen* and the evening proceeded to a meandering chatter about work, politics, common friends and a shared past.

Dinner was served and comprised two enormous bowls of goat meat curry and *chapatti*. The enormous size of the bowls and the absence of anything other than goat meat curry and *chapatti* caught my attention. While many would have considered such a meal very basic, almost inadequate for a formal invitation, for a meat eater, especially of a lower-middle class background such as Nandu was, it captured the essence of a good meal and lavish hospitality. Lal Chacha asked for an empty bowl and removed some of the curry and meat pieces from his bowl into it. There was evidently so much meat in his bowl that even a hearty eater like Lal Chacha could not contemplate finishing it all. Or perhaps he knew that he had been served most of the meat and wanted to leave some for the host family but in a discreet manner. I would never know. Nandu expressed his disappointment that there was nothing for me (a vegetarian) and offered to arrange for some *dahl* to be cooked.

⁸⁰ It was unusual to see Nandu's son serve food to the guests, as in Hindu households, food is generally served by women. Most likely it was because Nandu and Lal Chacha were drinking alcohol, still unacceptable to most mothers and likely to arouse their protective instincts with regards to their daughters. Also, the presence of alcohol creates an 'unruly' masculine space to be avoided by respectable girls and women.

The son kept bringing out hot *chapattis* while the voices of Mrs Nandu and her daughter kept drifting out from the kitchen behind the curtain.

Those serving food, mostly the senior women of the household, maintain control over it, particularly if it is meat, and ensure that individual members receive their ‘deserved’ share. Irrespective of whether serving from the kitchen or at the table, they know in which order to serve, people’s appetites and preferences, and the quantity available to be apportioned. The social hierarchy of a household or the importance it attaches to a guest manifests itself during a meal in terms of who is served first, what kind of pieces they are served, and how insistently they are served a second helping, if at all.

This system is evident at the dining table of Lal Chacha’s house, though in a modified form as he is a single man and his mother is too old to serve food. Meat is rarely cooked at Lal Chacha’s house. When the urge to have meat is upon him, Lal Chacha usually buys cooked meat to have either at his *adda* (roadside hang out) or in his car along with alcohol, or he arranges for cooked meat to be delivered to a friend’s house at which he might be drinking. Sometimes though, he does cook chicken at home or asks the houseboy to cook it.

Lal Chacha buys the meat from the butcher shop in Ram Market, mostly chicken in small quantities. Depending on the gathering and the occasion, the chicken is either cooked in a clay pot on an open fire—when the occasion is festive and a few friends are invited—or on the gas stove in the kitchen. In either case the end product is chicken curry. Lal Chacha then instructs Mahendra, the houseboy, to serve it to Lal Chacha’s aging parents in small quantities with their dinner. When Lal Chacha’s friends sit down for dinner, Lal Chacha himself serves the main dish of the evening, chicken curry, though people are free to serve other items themselves. The favoured guest of the evening is served chicken curry the most warmly, insistently and repeatedly. For Lal Chacha, the preparation of chicken curry for guests is a way to display his hospitality and regard for them. At the same time the serving of chicken curry personally ensures that the control over the distribution of chicken curry, which is in limited quantity, is in his hands and is used to signal both equity and a special warmth.

Meat dishes are often shared with neighbours if they eat meat, with portions being sent to their houses. A portion may also be saved for when a favourite friend or relative comes visiting in the evening. Lal Chacha would often receive unexpected phone calls from a friend, spontaneously inviting him over to share freshly cooked fish or meat. Madhvan would always set aside a portion of any meat dish he cooked for Manish, his friend and landlord. But this practice is not restricted to meat dishes. The same is also done with

special or occasionally cooked vegetarian dishes, which serve the same function of celebratory meal and a breaker of monotony in vegetarian households. They too are shared with neighbours.

While this custom of sharing food continues to be practiced among some neighbours and individuals in Sushant Lok, it is generally less common today, partly because of the isolation and indifference of urban living and partly because, with increased affluence, what was once special has now become commonplace.

4.2.4 The decline of Sunday lunch

The institution of Sunday lunch too is on the decline. Because of the small size of households on the one hand and increased affluence on the other, what was once celebratory and festive has now become more accessible and thus commonplace. In both vegetarian and meat-eating households, special meals marking a break from routine and prepared on weekends and holidays are time consuming and elaborate. Whereas in the past, the constraint on such meals was the availability of resources, today the greatest constraint is paucity of time. There is so much else to do on Sundays that Sunday lunch has been replaced by a Sunday visit to a restaurant, shopping mall or movie. Sunday itself has lost the charm it once had when the working week was six days long. With the advent of the five-day working week—or at the most five and a half days—the weekend appears to come more frequently than previously.

Finally, many young middle-class Indians now attach the importance that their parents did to Sunday lunch to Friday evening drinks. Friday evening is the time for celebration, a celebration more individualistic and focused on friends outside rather than relatives and home. Such evenings normally involve a group of friends getting together over alcohol and food, including snacks and meat dishes, mostly consumed as finger food, that have been ordered or bought from outside. In such gatherings, alcohol and meat signify celebration and good times.

While the practices of meat consumption at home have not remained untouched by change, many practices continue unaltered. The meat preparations, the cooking of meat and the manner of consumption have shown resilience in the face of changing social and economic context. However, the practices of meat consumption have shifted visibly outside the home, in the public domain.

4.3 Eating (Meat) Out in Urban India

4.3.1 The origins of routine eating out

The relative continuity in the practices of meat consumption and avoidance at the household level is contrasted by a more dramatic change underpinned by the emergence of the idea of the individual as the consumer and more reflexive actions of self-expression. Related to this change is the fact that the household no longer holds a monopoly over the preparation of food and geographies of consumption have shifted.

The shift of the locus of meat consumption to the marketplace is part of the larger story of the shift of food consumption in general from the home to the marketplace, as described in earlier chapters. This also happens to be an especially neglected part of the generally understudied area of food consumption in South Asia (Liechty, 2005). In examining transactions in food and sex in modern Kathmandu, Liechty concludes that the fundamental change in the practices of food consumption have been brought about by the replacement of caste norms as the basis of food practices by a logic underpinned by class-based economic transactions.

Public eating in India is largely a product of the colonial encounter. The colonial economy favoured certain urban areas over others, leading to their rapid economic growth and emergence as centres of education, business and employment. The Presidency⁸¹ towns of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras were a product of this period of Indian history and operated as magnets for young men seeking education or looking for opportunities to earn a living.

The pre-colonial movement of people often meant the movement of entire families or communities seeking to avoid persecution or natural calamities, or in search of better opportunities. Established caste-based norms about what one could eat, where, with whom, and how food should be prepared were observed and food remained strictly a household affair. As food was prepared at home, its preparation and consumption could be controlled as per caste prescriptions. In contrast migration to early colonial settlements and urban centres in search of economic opportunities mostly involved men. Once in colonial urban centres these men either cooked themselves or ate at caste-based eateries, which catered to their food practices (Conlon, 1995). In his celebrated ethnographic work

⁸¹ Presidency was roughly the equivalent of large administrative units into which British India was organised. Presidency towns were the administrative seats of these units.

The Remembered Village, M.N. Srinivas (1976) noted that newly proliferating teashops, although accessible to all, maintained caste distinctions through various means.

As food preparation and consumption started to move gradually from the private domain into the public sphere, the household's control on practices of preparing and consuming food started to weaken. Given their elaborate nature, better suited to the slow pace of village life, it is not surprising that these practices were modified and adapted in the urban context. It has been a decisive journey from the sanctified kitchen of the household to caste-based eateries, to vegetarian restaurants and now to restaurants serving both meat and vegetarian food.

4.3.2 Public eating in Dehradun—Responding to a need

There is a vibrant public eating culture in Dehradun. One cannot walk far without seeing food being sold and consumed. There is also a wide variety of businesses selling food, including pushcarts selling street food and snacks, small eateries with a few tables and benches, roadside eating joints and tea stalls, and more upmarket restaurants. More recently, international quick service restaurants such as McDonald's, KFC, Domino's Pizza, Pizza Hut and Subway and food courts in shopping malls have opened for business. They have also inspired various local start-ups selling burgers, pizzas, sandwiches, fried chicken and pasta.

While public eating-places have existed in Dehradun since the colonial period, when the town mostly comprised government institutions and academies, educational institutions, army garrisons and retired public servants, there has been a proliferation of food outlets in recent years. These spaces, serving both Indian and foreign cuisines, reflect the changing nature of the city. They reflect the population's growing affluence and disposable income as well as the different segments of the market.

As described in Chapter 2, in 2000, Dehradun became the provisional capital of Uttaranchal (later renamed Uttarakhand), the newly created hill state carved out of the state of Uttar Pradesh. While always favoured by the middle classes and the rich, especially from north India, in 2000 its population began to grow rapidly on the back of an expanding public administration, a construction boom and the proliferation of educational institutions and industrial estates. Like the colonial cities of the past, the opportunities offered by this new state capital attracted many single men, and also women. The proliferation of public eating-places was, at least initially, largely to cater to

the demand for food among these men and women. Many did not have kitchens and many more did not know how to cook. The growth of Dehradun also attracted middle- and upper-class individuals and families. As in Conlon's (1995) colonial Bombay, upmarket restaurants, visited for pleasure and as lifestyle statements, emerged to cater to this segment of the market.

In the last decade, Dehradun has emerged as an important centre of higher education. There are at least seven universities in Dehradun as well as various professional colleges and institutes. Most of these are privately run and offer an alternative to those who fail to find a place in the state-run higher education system. Indeed, the state-run system, which is both less expensive and more prestigious than these alternatives, can no longer cope with the increasing demand for higher education - a means of social and economic mobility to ambitious young men and women.

Just as men once left their villages in search of employment, thereby transforming the social and economic landscape of the country, more young Indians than ever before are leaving home to seek higher education. Some may be lucky enough to find accommodation in the halls of residence and hostels of the colleges and institutes they join. However, these facilities are incapable of meeting the demand for student housing, and most students end up having to find private accommodation for themselves. They live as paying guests (where preference is given to female students) and in privately run hostels (again, more easily available to women), rent single-room dwellings individually or rent a house as a group.

Their new lifestyle leaves these students with little time to cook. Many young men have never cooked and could cook little even if they wanted to. Some end up using the services of a *dabba wala*, where a household cooks food that is then delivered to the houses of customers in the afternoon and evening. This paid service generally operates based on monthly subscription. Others may strike a deal with a nearby eatery, where they then go for lunch and dinner. Such food is often of poor quality and taste.

The desire for a 'change of taste' drives these students to quick service restaurants, eateries and roadside food joints and pushcarts selling snacks of various kinds, including bread omelette, *chowmin*, *momos*, spring rolls, burgers and chicken soup. The crowd of young college-going men at these stalls in the evenings is indicative of both the popularity of this kind of street food and the reliance of a large section of the population on them.

The international quick service restaurants and their local variants benefit from the disproportionately large youthful population of Dehradun as well as families with young children. These two groups form the mainstay of these businesses, although people of all ages frequent such outlets. These restaurants are mostly located in new and modern shopping enclaves, to which people increasingly gravitate. These brightly lit and painted outlets with their air-conditioning, range of western food, often adapted to the Indian palette, self-service counters, and plastic chairs and tables offer reasonably priced western fast food in a convenient set up. Spending relatively little money, young couples or groups of friends can spend hours in these establishments without being made uncomfortable by the presence of a waiter, as would be the case in a regular restaurant. This last point is an important reason for the popularity of these restaurants with the young residents of Dehradun.

As described in Chapter 2, while living in Sushant Lok, I would routinely see a large number of young men and women walking on the roads of the colony in the evenings. Most ambled along aimlessly in small groups until after dark, then suddenly the roads would be quiet again. Their numbers diminished in winter and surged in summer. Many of these young men and women were from the outhouses of the bungalows in Sushant Lok. Lack of space at home and the poor living conditions drive people out of their houses. They get out whenever they can. In summer, when the heat makes the dwelling more oppressive than at other times, their numbers increase. But where can they go?

4.3.3 Public eating in Dehradun—The modern need for ‘privacy’

There are very few public leisure places in Indian towns. The few that there are struggle against the encroaching population; they are in disrepair, overcrowded and unsafe, especially for women and young couples. A visitor to a park, historical monument or college campus with open space cannot miss couples, young men and women, huddled together behind trees and bushes, trying to carve out what little privacy they can.

Bollywood and television have long peddled the idea of ‘boyfriend’ and ‘girlfriend’, but only in recent times has this become a marker of having come of age as a modern, urban youth. However, while the idea of courtship may have evolved, taking one’s boyfriend or girlfriend home is not yet an established practice given the prevalent norms of acceptable behaviour. Most parents and landlords would not approve of it. To young people, quick service restaurants offer a relatively inexpensive, safe and dignified alternative to the

public spaces of India's urban centres. One may also count in this category a shopping mall.

A shopping mall is a large multi-level air-conditioned building with wide corridors lined with shops selling various products and services. They are neat and clean, brightly lit, air-conditioned, dust free and involve no entry fee or obligation to spend money. They often have a multiplex (a modern film-screening complex with more than one screening area and simultaneously screening two or more films) and a food court—an additional attraction for visitors, especially the young. A food court is a collection of stalls serving various Indian cuisines and popular western and Chinese food in a fast food, self-service format. Visitors to malls can spend any amount of time in the food court socialising with or without food. The seating area, a collection of plastic tables and chairs, is common to all food stalls and, therefore, not monitored or controlled by anyone. The environment is modern, safe, clean and reasonably comfortable. In being there and consuming the products on offer, a person can feel one with the 'dynamic middle class', a part of the larger change across the country, a part of the process of modernisation.

The story of the public consumption and availability of meat and its normalisation is closely tied to the larger story of the emergence of colonial urban centres in India. Prior to the large-scale population movement from rural to urban areas that occurred under colonial urbanisation, people lived in largely homogeneous villages or neighbourhoods in medieval towns. In these towns, meat was either not available at all or its sale was restricted to certain areas. However, even with urbanisation, until recently shops selling meat were few and still could only be found in certain parts of the town. The business in meat was restricted and purchasing it required effort and planning. Today, the normalisation of meat consumption in urban India is evident in its ubiquity in both cooked and raw forms.

4.3.4 Meat consumption in public spaces

Outside the home, meat is often consumed as a snack, and less commonly as part of a meal. One site of consumption is at restaurants offering sit-down meals served by waiters. These are generally upmarket and expensive, visited only occasionally by couples, families or groups of friends celebrating an occasion. Here, a few dishes are ordered and shared, including one or more meat dishes. Sharing in this context is as much a part of keeping the expense of the meal down as it is of the overall experience of having a meal together with friends and family. Equally importantly, most restaurants in India do not as

yet have a system of serving preparations and portions for individual patrons. The servings are large, served in large bowls and plates, to be shared. Further, as individual items or dishes rarely make a complete meal, ordering as a group and sharing makes sense. Rice and bread (*roti*, *chapatti* and *naan*) are integral to such meals, which begin with non-alcoholic drinks; most restaurants, being family oriented, do not serve alcohol.⁸² This is an elaborate and expensive dining experience, reserved for the rare special occasion.

The other setting in which meat is consumed as part of a meal is at roadside eateries. This may be a room with a number of tables and chairs, serving basic food including meat; or it may be a 'hole in the wall' operation, with an outlet to serve food from a cart or counter. In the latter case, food may be consumed standing or the eatery might have a few high tables and chairs, set up in the open, on the pavement or on a footpath. These eateries are used regularly by their patrons and are popular with predominantly male office goers, businessmen, workers and students. Some have a long history and have acquired a reputation for serving excellent meat dishes, in which case they may start to attract more well-off customers, who either come to the shop or, more often, send someone for a takeaway.

The food at these outlets is meat, rice and roti along with dahl and basic vegetable curry. Most patrons, especially the regulars, order one dish – normally a tried and tested preparation - with rice or roti to accompany it. Most dishes are served by the plate, half plate or, in some cases, quarter plate. This is to accommodate the various categories of patron. Most patrons come alone or, rarely, in groups of two or three. The visit is purposeful, short and focused on food. There is none of the sharing and relaxation that accompany food in upmarket restaurants. The service is quick and the turnaround of customers rapid.

Three cuisines have dominated the cooked meat market of Dehradun. The traditional north Indian, Mughlai or Punjabi fare includes kebabs, kathi rolls, *tikkas*, *tandoori* meat and fried fish. This fare is sold in the Hindu-dominated areas of the city and Rajpur Road. Muslim preparations, which include, in addition to kebabs and *tikkas*, dishes such as *haleem*, *nihari* and *biryani*, are sold in the Muslim-dominated areas around the Clock Tower, Tehsil (lower court) and the railway station. This area is popular with the young

⁸² Another reason may be that obtaining a license to serve alcohol is difficult and expensive.

population, who visit the eateries late at night in groups. However, many Hindus avoid these eateries because of reservations about food cooked in Muslim kitchens by Muslims and the cooking of buffalo meat.⁸³ Some Hindus are also suspicious that beef might be clandestinely sold in these eateries.

On the Dehradun-Delhi highway just before Muzzafernagar, there is a row of *dhabas* (roadside eateries) with Punjabi sounding names: *Nanak*, *Sher-e-Punjab*, *Khalsa* and so on. The toll road to Delhi starts here and perhaps it is a good point for weary travellers to stop for refreshment before speeding into the infrastructure of the twenty-first century and onto Delhi. But most of these *dhabas* were empty when I drove past them, an unusual sight for Punjabi *dhabas* as their food is considered to be both tasty and hygienic. I asked Mangal, the taxi driver, why the *dhabas* were empty. He smiled and said: ‘these *dhabas* are all run by local Muslims; they have given their businesses Punjabi names so that Hindus would not mind stopping for a meal or a snack. However, most regulars on the road know this business strategy and stay away from the *dhabas* here. If you are hungry, we can stop at Pandit’s (i.e., ‘Brahmin’s’) *dhaba* just before the city of Meerut.’

One cuisine that has spread rapidly through Dehradun, indeed through much of north India, is the Chinese-Tibetan fusion of *chowmin*, *momo* (Tibetan dumplings), spring rolls, fried rice and *thukpa* (Tibetan soup). As mentioned before, this cuisine came with the Tibetan refugees who started to arrive in Dehradun and the surrounding areas in the 1950s. Tibetan restaurants in Clement Town and Rajpur Village are especially popular with young men and women. They are reasonably priced, welcoming of couples and represent both the exotic and modern—Tibetan restaurants often serve buffalo. For a section of the Indian middle class, especially the young, eating beef or buffalo’s meat⁸⁴ has been associated with being modern (Mookherjee, 2008). This act amounts to breaking the boundaries set by tradition and, therefore, signals modernity.

Beyond the restaurants in the Tibetan colonies, and as with other cuisines, this food is also often eaten in roadside eateries, sold on pushcarts and by street vendors. So popular is this cuisine today that *momos* and *chowmin* are sold at almost every street corner, either by themselves or along with other Chinese-Tibetan or Indian snacks and street food. Their popularity is accounted for by the fact that they take little time to cook, can be sold from the back of a bicycle, are inexpensive, are a complete snack in themselves, have been

⁸³ Some Hindus from participant households said that they do not have problems with Muslim cooks per se, only with the ‘fact’ that they are not clean and their kitchens are unhygienic.

⁸⁴ Prominently displayed on the menu cards in such restaurants under the heading ‘buff’.

adapted to the north Indian palette, and are considered healthy because they are not deep-fried and heavy.

In Dehradun women are rarely seen at roadside eateries or at pushcarts, particularly those that sell meat dishes⁸⁵. The overwhelmingly male composition of the customers reinforces the above-mentioned masculine nature of public spaces in India, and the near exclusion of women from public spaces dealing in meat. In her portrayal of a middle-class Bengali household in Calcutta, Donner (2008) underlines how, while male members of the household consume meat including ‘beef and pork dishes in restaurants, which is crucial for exclusively male sociality and is accompanied by alcohol’ (p. 147), there are various restrictions on women’s consumption of meat and other food items:

Widows do not consume ‘hot’ foods including meat, which are thought to enhance sexual appetite ... [and] while it was not suggested that unmarried women should be forced to become vegetarians (and unlike widows there was no rule that applied to all unmarried women), all those I met were expected to give up eating fish and meat, both regarded not only as ‘heating’ but also as blood-producing. (pp. 147, 158)

4.4 Ideas of Masculinity—Eating Meat and Defending the Cow

The masculine nature of meat is not unique to India. It appears to be more or less a universal phenomenon:

When I was young, men were regarded as more like brute beasts, and ate and drank accordingly. Barbecue, rare steak, beer, whiskey, and the like were purely men’s foods. Women were refined and cultured and ate jellied salads, creamed chicken, yogurt, and other pale, bland, soft foods. Needless to say, no proper man would eat such things, any more than a ‘decent’ woman would gnaw on a barbecued rib. (Anderson, 2005, p. 134)

Sitting on the terrace of Madhvan’s house on a weekday evening we saw the lights in the hill town of Mussoorie come on, one after another. I had just reminded Madhvan’s friend Gogol of an invitation he had extended to me to visit him in Nainital when the winter chill literally ‘froze’ the otherwise incessantly revolving wheels of work. When that invitation was first extended Gogol had said to me ‘that is the time when I indulge my otherwise neglected hobbies such as reading’. What did he like to cook I had asked him then. His response was brief but, in retrospect, illuminating. ‘Meat’, he had replied.

When, on Madhvan’s terrace, I reminded him of our earlier conversation he shrugged his shoulders and replied that he did not feel

⁸⁵ A few milk bars or fast food kiosks on Rajpur road may be an exception to this norm.

excited about cooking meat any longer and, while he ate it from time to time, the prospect of eating meat no longer excited him as it once did. When he was a young man and needed energy, whether at the NCC [National Cadet Corps]⁸⁶ camps or when trekking with fellow NGO workers in the deep mountains or ‘as a young husband’, then he would sit down with his ‘comrades’ or alone and enjoy a meal of meat and rice. ‘Did the young women he interacted with at the camp or during work or his wife also eat meat to remain similarly energetic’, I asked. He looked at me and said:

‘Now you know in our [Hindu] culture being a vegetarian is virtuous; it is especially so for women. That is why a number of women, including those from meat-eating households and cultures do not eat meat ... It is particularly bad for a respectable woman to consume meat in a public space such as a restaurant or an office or a camp. Imagine a woman sucking on a bone or chewing a piece of meat ... One starts to question their character’.

Various writers have commented on the gendered nature of meat consumption (Adams, 1991; Fiddes, 1991; Matthew & Heine, 2011; Sobal, 2005; Twigg, 1979). The argument goes that men had the necessary physiology for hunting. They needed strength to hunt and this strength was derived from consuming the meat of the hunted animals. However, perhaps more important in promoting the association between maleness and meat has been the connection between meat on the one hand and the defining male attributes of strength and masculinity on the other. Rozin et al. (2012), in exploring the relationship between maleness and meat, note:

In a traditionally male-dominated world ... Meat has generally been considered to be a particularly appropriate food for males, one that promotes manliness. (p. 631)

In India, the links between meat and masculinity are shaped by both tradition and history. As noted before, historians attribute the rise of vegetarianism in India to the influence of Buddhism and Jainism and the associated concept of *ahimsa*, non-violence, a key tenet of both religions. This philosophy eventually found its way into Hinduism, with Brahminical Hinduism promoting non-violence and the associated vegetarianism as the purist state of being. However, this non-violent purity also influenced the ruling classes and their will to fight and shed blood in the battlefield. Several kings—having once successfully completed their bloody conquests—converted to Buddhism and Jainism and,

⁸⁶ The National Cadet Corps is the Cadet Corps of the Indian Army. Once compulsory for young students, it is now voluntary.

allegedly, renounced violence. One such king was Harshavardhan or Harsha (590–647AD), the last Hindu emperor of north India, who later converted to Buddhism.

4.4.1 Meat and Hindu masculinity

Brahminical Hinduism's restrictions on the consumption of meat has cast a lasting shadow of doubt about the 'masculinity' of the Hindu male. This angst about Hindu masculinity is intertwined with the medieval and modern history of the region. Consumption of meat by victorious adversaries—the invading Muslim armies from west and central Asia first and the Europeans later—and its avoidance by caste Hindus is alluded to in the construction of the narrative of defeat and the 'emasculatation' of the Hindu male.

Even an avid vegetarian like Mahatma Gandhi believed as a young man that the superior performance of his Muslim friend in the sporting arena, an outcome of his superior physical strength, was due to his friend's consumption of meat. Gandhi believed that the subjugation of India by the British could be explained, at least in part, by their meat consumption and saw the consumption of meat by Indians as a necessary pre-condition for a favourable outcome in their fight for independence from the British (Gandhi, 1927/1993; Roy, 2002).

More recently the close relationship between meat and masculinity has focused on the 'other' of Hindus, the Muslims. Meat-eating Bengali Hindu households distinguish themselves from Muslims on the basis of the *meat heavy* diets that the latter consume, not the consumption of meat per se. The 'bodies of men belonging to the said group are coded in specific ways—Muslim men being "more driven by sexual urges", and "more violent"' (Donner, 2008, p. 149). Sian (2011) notes that the narrative of the 'forced' conversion of Sikh and Hindu girls by Muslim men in the United Kingdom, 'establishes a contrastive relationship with Muslim male "predators" and Sikh male "protectors"' (p. 116). In India, a new term, 'Love Jihad', has been coined to refer to the 'strategy' by which Muslim men enter into deceitful relationships with non-Muslim, especially Hindu, women with the aim of converting them to Islam.

In many such accounts of these 'forced' conversions or 'Love Jihad', and also in the descriptions of forced conversions during the time of the partition of India, the ritual act of conversion is consummated by placing beef into the mouth of the new convert (Lapierre & Collins, 1975; Sahni, 1974). Regardless of whether such activities actually

took place, the idea behind the description of this act of beef consumption as the culmination of the process of converting to Islam underlines the symbolic significance of the cow as sacred to Hindus, and the eating of beef as the ultimate act of conversion.

It is not surprising then that increased concerns about Love Jihad have coincided with right-wing Hindu organisations' increasingly aggressive stance against cow slaughter and the sale and consumption of beef. This increased vigilance regarding consumption of foods is not new. Mary Douglas draws a parallel between patrolling the boundaries of religion and of permissible food:

It would seem that whenever people are aware of encroachment and danger, dietary rules controlling what goes into the body would serve as a vivid analogy of the corpus of their cultural categories at risk. (Douglas & Isherwood, 1979/1996, p. 79)

There have been other references to the hyper-masculinity of Muslim men throughout the right-wing narration of medieval Indian history, replete with instances of plunder and desecration of Hindu temples, mass murder of Hindu men, and rape and conversion of Hindu women. In the Hindu right-wing historical narrative, the nation of India is depicted as a woman⁸⁷ and as a mother violated by the invading Muslim armies, among others. Cows are also given the status of 'mother'. Therefore, protecting the cow and women is protecting the nation—a Hindu nation threatened by Muslims. It is then (as a matter of formal logic) understandable that to the right-wing Hindu organisations, the defence of the nation is not possible without the defence of the cow and Hindu women. According to this narrative, the hyper-masculinity—and appetite—of the Muslim male has to be controlled to defend the nation.

Some Indian states, including Maharashtra in western India and Haryana in northern India, have passed legislation to eliminate the sale of beef completely. Vigilante groups in Rajasthan have been patrolling the highways at night to intercept cattle smugglers (Biswas, 2015), while in bordering Uttar Pradesh, in September 2015, a Muslim man in his fifties was lynched at his house by a Hindu mob on the suspicion of having eaten beef (BBC, 2015a). An artist who hoisted a dummy of a cow at the Jaipur Art Festival to draw attention to the plight of the cow in India was arrested by police for hurting the religious sentiments of 'a community' (BBC, 2015b). The artist, a Hindu, was later released.

⁸⁷ Bharat Mata or Mother India

The public display of the ‘masculinity’ of the Hindu community in the defence of the cow fits well with the strategy of right-wing Hindu organisations. Valiani (2010) argues that Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a right-wing Hindu organisation, subjects its cadres to intense discipline, both physical and moral, and imparts to them training in the use of ‘non-mechanised’ weapons, to prepare a force of masculine men who would not hesitate in using violence to serve the ideology of the RSS. A video taken at a recent training camp organised by an affiliate organisation of the RSS caused outrage in India as it shows some trainees fighting against men dressed up as Muslims (BBC, 2016).

The increasingly masculine posture of Hinduism in the public space and in media has been subject to much commentary. Anuradha Kapur (1993) describes in detail the transformation in the depiction of the Hindu God Rama from androgynous king seated next to his wife, to a warrior god, bare chested, bow and arrow in hand, ripped and ready to inflict death and destruction on the enemy (see Figure 2).



Figure 2: The change in the depiction of Rama

The global standards of the ideal muscular body have influenced this alteration of Rama from a benign monarch to a crusading God:

In the case of contemporary Rama, there appears to be a regulated, ‘disciplined’ body—disciplined both by a gymnastic aesthetic and the standardisation of the tall, slim and muscle bound body under the influence of a hegemonic globalised modern aesthetic. (Kaur, 2002, p. 79)

4.4.2 Meat, alcohol and the practice of masculinity

The link between the vegetarianism espoused and adopted by Brahminical Hinduism and the emasculating depiction of Hindu men may really refer to the emasculating influence of the philosophy of non-violence rather than the practice of vegetarianism itself, as not all Hindus were or are vegetarian. In Brahminical Hinduism meat eating is associated with Kshatriyas or the members of the warrior class, stereotypically the most masculine caste group:

However disgusting meat may appear as seen against Brahminic norms, a diet based on meat is nevertheless prized from the point of view of a therapy to encourage strength and virility as concentrated within the person of the king by means of treatment. (Zimmermann, 1987, p. 185)

Food derived from animals or animal products is often perceived as superior to plant-derived food products for providing strength and vitality. This perception is not necessarily confined to meat. Rozin et al. (2012) found no evidence to support the hypothesis that meat derived from the body of the animal was considered masculine, while animal products such as milk and eggs, derived from the female organs, were considered feminine. Rather, all animal-derived products are considered providers of strength and vitality.

I first saw my brother have eggs when as a college student he started to build his body. After a workout he would break a couple of eggs and mix them into a glass of milk before drinking the concoction. As a student of science I knew why he was doing it; eggs, and animal products generally, were more nutritious than the strictly vegetarian food we consumed at home. (Mrs Mehta in conversation)

The stereotypically masculine groups in India, such as the Yadavs, Jats and Gujjars, are predominantly vegetarian—either traditionally or having turned vegetarian to claim a higher status in the caste hierarchy (Michelutti, 2008; Srinivas, 1952). The image of the vigour and masculinity of these groups is derived from and largely based on their ‘mythic’ consumption of milk and other dairy products, especially butter and *ghee* (Michelutti, 2008). In his 1992 book *The Wrestler’s Body* Joseph Alter notes that half of the wrestlers in Banaras (Varanasi), his field site were Yadavs, many of whom were engaged in dairy business. This enabled them easier access to milk, integral to the diet of an Indian wrestler. Continuing this theme in subsequent work Alter writes:

Most wrestlers agreed that to drink more than two liters of milk, a half liter of *ghi*, and a kilogram or more of almonds per day is essential for proper physical and moral development. These items are not only regarded as nutritious, but they are also thought of as cooling and *sattva* by nature. (Alter, 1993, p. 56)

The above-mentioned hyper-masculine ethnic groups of modern north India, the Jats, Gujjars and Yadavs, have historically been associated with agriculture and animal husbandry. However, the political and economic ascendancy of these groups since the 1970s has resulted in a shift in their food practices. The Yadavs of Mathura, while strictly vegetarian at home, frequently organise meat and alcohol parties:

Yadavs need to indulge in non-vegetarian food ('hot' substances) and alcohol (hot) to enhance their masculinity, martial outlook and political force. Organising chicken and whisky picnics on the bank of the Yamuna River are part of Yadav macho culture, which nourishes the production of a new class of muscled 'democratic' big men. (Michelutti, 2008, p. 94)

The weekend parties at the NGO in Sushant Lok were not unlike the 'chicken and whisky parties' of the Yadavs described by Michelutti. They were organised around alcohol and meat and included the same set of people, only men, well known to one another. Meat, mostly chicken, was either cooked in the kitchen of the NGO office or, more often, ordered from outside. Such parties would start around 7:00 in the evening and end between 9:00 and 10:00 pm, when people would return to their homes for dinner. The evening would focus on whisky, meat, mundane conversation and gossip.

Sometimes, a few members of the gathering would decide to 'party on'. They would get into a jeep or car and drive to an alcohol shop to buy more alcohol.⁸⁸ After purchasing alcohol, mixers and plastic glasses, the party would drive around the city drinking—glasses on the dashboard, music playing on the speakers, loudly conversing—before heading to an eatery or popular roadside stall selling meat dishes.

In India, drinking alcohol is primarily an outdoor sport, played at night...Indians love drinking in their cars...There are two types of car-drinkers. The first is the wedding drinker. His car follows at the tail of a wedding procession. The bar is in the boot of the car – also known as 'car-o-bar'...The second type of car-drinker parks his car at a friendly "chicken-point"...This drinker, usually accompanied by a male sidekick, drinks at a more leisurely pace, the plastic glass safely ensconced in the bottle holder down by the gearshift. The chicken tikkas are passed through the window (Mehrotra, 2016).

In Dehradun, there are many eating-places that cater to and thrive on night business or the 'night economy' as it is now called. These places are minimalist; often just a kiosk, a push cart, a few chairs and tables on the pavement or by the roadside, a high flame stove top or two and a *tandoor* are all there is to these businesses. Some young men in greased clothes work at the *tandoor* and the stove while others serve customers and take orders. Cars, jeeps and bikes are haphazardly parked and groups of young men can be seen drinking and having loud conversations, their language and themes of discussion far from polite. Many are regulars as is evident from the familiarity they display by calling the staff by their first name and the staff, in turn, responding with a similar display of familiarity. Mostly meat is ordered, sometimes accompanied by roti or naan. At these outlets a number of alcohol fuelled 'masculine' bodies find themselves practicing 'masculinity'

⁸⁸ Alcohol shops in Dehradun close at 9:00 pm in winter and 10:00 pm in summer.

through gesture, posture and language—both body language and verbal. Frequently this leads to that ultimate display of masculinity—a verbal spat followed by pushing and jostling and sometimes a full-blown physical brawl into which members of the groups find themselves getting sucked. The provocation could be a gesture or a look, a remark or the tone of voice—no issue is too small.

Another set of more elaborate parties was held at the NGO to mark occasions: a farewell, welcome, anniversary or get-together. These were organised at the initiative of Manoj. For such parties, the guest list expanded to accommodate some of those not normally present at the weekend parties. There was music, dancing, a bonfire (if organised in winter) food and alcohol, and female guests—mostly foreign volunteers. The presence of female guests increased the formality of the atmosphere slightly, as most men stayed outside on the lawn, while female guests spent most of their time indoors. Manoj and a few young staff of the NGO, Anoushka in particular, kept the female guests entertained.

While the guest list expanded on such occasions, it continued to be tightly controlled. From among the NGO staff, only those members who Manoj approved of were invited. Some, like Vikram, who neither ate meat nor drank alcohol, were rarely invited; while others, such as Anshul, were invited regularly due to their upper-middle class confidence and command over English, ability to get along with the foreign volunteers, and their ownership of Bluetooth-linked speakers and smart phones, allowing them to flaunt their taste in western music and demonstrate an affinity with foreign visitors.

In contrast to the more informal weekly gatherings where meat was mostly bought from outside, for these occasions meat was invariably cooked at the NGO office. This was both more economical, and also put on display for the visiting guests the finer skills of the NGO men. At these parties, meat was served as finger food and figured prominently in the main course. The conversation with the foreign volunteers tended to be laden with sexual innuendo, with Dr Mehta talking about his sexual life and the importance of sex in the happiness quotient of an individual, and Manoj responding to a request to play poker by observing that the only poker he could play was strip poker. This helps to explain why wives and more ‘conservative’ female members of staff (i.e., those who did not drink) were not invited to such parties.

I once suggested to Manoj, as he was planning one of his more elaborate parties, that it might be a good idea to invite families as well. He looked at me, then at Govind, shook his head and said ‘why do you want to deprive us of some fun in life?’. These parties, where alcohol and meat were served, were marked by the absence of the wives and sisters

of the men present; that is, it was not advisable to include the women of the household to whom a certain standard of respectability was applied. However, this same reservation did not extend to female foreign volunteers, who instead were thought to add to the fun and frolic. A different standard of respectability applied to these women. They offered the possibility of ‘fun’.

Last year we had an intern from Europe. Her friend, also from Europe was interning at another NGO near Sushant Lok. When it was time for her to go back home after completing her internship Manoj sir and I decided to organise a farewell party for her and her friend. Madam (Manoj’s wife) was visiting her parents. We cooked some chicken and organised some snacks and alcohol. Soon we were very drunk hugging each other, dancing, and taking photographs. I was hoping that it would all lead to something more exciting but nothing seemed to be happening. As I was drunk I got carried away and smashed my gas filled cigarette lighter against the floor. It exploded with a loud bang. This scared the girls and they ran out of the building and onto the road. Manoj and I ran after them and after much convincing they agreed to let us walk them home. It was late at night and their welfare was our responsibility.

When they went back to Europe they put the photographs from the evening onto their Facebook pages, which was linked to our Facebook pages. There we were lying in the grass with our heads in their laps. Manoj deleted the girls from his contact list and instructed me to do the same. Although nothing had happened we were worried that our wives would see these photographs and get upset. (Govind in conversation)

If the consumption of meat is associated with masculinity does its avoidance necessarily signify emasculation? This is not a question that is easily answer, but rather is context specific. There is a perception among Hindus and non-Hindus alike that Hinduism privileges vegetarianism. The superiority of vegetarian food is therefore implicit in the Hindu practice whether it be everyday food practice or ritualistic food practice. This thesis has already discussed a hierarchy of food reinforcing the hierarchy of caste. *Satvik* food –without meat, excessive spices, garlic or onion – sits at the top of Hindu food hierarchy. It is food that is offered to Gods and should be consumed by caste Hindus. It is central to bodily, physical, and spiritual purity.

Moving away from this ideal to the everyday we find the expression of the superiority of vegetarian food in the remark of Mr Mehta that ‘meat is not human food or fit for human consumption’. This unsuitability of meat for human consumption may be expressed in terms of the limitations of human anatomy to deal with and ingest meat as food but more often the concern about meat and alcohol –base food and drink – is expressed in terms of the spiritual well being of the consumer. Meat and alcohol are considered to evoke *rakshasi pravati*,

demonic tendencies, they are associated with loose morals and violence of thought and action. These items are associated with irreligiosity. Older people can easily be heard describing the open consumption of alcohol and meat, as *ghor kalyug*, utter descent into the dark ages. Young men and women who consume meat and alcohol are considered to have lost the path. In these tropes abstinence from meat and alcohol symbolise virtue, not emasculation.

Even by those who consume meat and alcohol a person who abstains is often referred to as *sant* a ‘saint’. In matrimonial alliances not drinking or eating meat are considered signs of virtue and such men are considered more desirable as husbands than those who consume meat and alcohol. The two are often associated with gambling, courtesans, financial distress, neglect of family responsibilities, and domestic abuse and violence.

But like every social phenomenon there is another facet to this story. As epitomised by the rhetoric of Lal Chacha, those who consume meat and alcohol ‘share a bond’, a sense of ‘camaraderie’ that is forged at least in part on the basis of a shared understanding of what this signifies about the consumer. These are ideas of being ‘alive’ or *zindadil* (alive to the possibilities of life), being fun as opposed to boring or *murda* (dead to the possibilities that life has to offer), modern as opposed to orthodox (*ponga pandit* a term used to ridicule those who follow tradition without questioning), a risk taker as opposed to fearful, a *baaghi* (rebel) as opposed to a mama’s boy (*aadarsh baalak*). But once again the ideas of masculinity associated with the consumption of meat or a sense of superiority that comes with being vegetarian are not constant or uniform but instead context specific. In a vegetarian context such as a temple or a ritual vegetarians may feel superior to meat eaters. However, when a person who does not eat meat or drink alcohol is with people who do, especially in a secular context, he or she could feel out of place or experience a sense of inferiority or exclusion.

The sense of superiority or distinction that comes with not consuming meat or alcohol is also a function of age and social status, with older people and those enjoying a higher social status feeling more assured of the superiority of their practices. Whereas Mr Mehta a retired senior government officer was convinced of the superiority of his vegetarian food practices and rationalised them in scientific and moral terms, Mr Pande – a middle aged accountant and also a vegetarian – frequently referred to his discomfort in social gatherings because he did not consume meat and alcohol.

Where this sense of superiority is felt it is generally still expressed in terms of the traditional Indian Hindu discourse of purity and pollution. In this regard it is different from a sense of superiority that comes with abstinence from meat and alcohol in the western society where this superiority may generally be expressed in relatively modern narratives of concern for the

environment, reducing consumption, animal cruelty, and modern health science⁸⁹. My fieldwork did not lead me to conclude that within north Indian Hindu society abstinence would give a sense of distinction to an *individual* at the level of individual choice, especially where expressed in terms of secular narrative(s). This is not to say that it may not be happen in small, highly educated and westernised sections of society, especially those in large cities, but I did not find evidence of it during my fieldwork.

4.5 Meat, Hospitality and Celebrations

4.5.1 Hospitality and festivity = meat and alcohol

Shortly after I started my fieldwork, Lal Chacha walked into my living room one evening. From the expression on his face and his body language I could tell that something was bothering him. As we sat down with our cups of tea, he opened up and started to give words to his thoughts. I have reproduced below the excerpts from the conversation:

LC: Do you know Dr Mehta is not going to serve meat in the cocktail party [ahead of his son's wedding]? What kind of cocktail party is this and what kind of a wedding celebration?'

MC: But Lal Chacha surely you were not expecting him to serve meat to guests at the cocktail party. He is a Jain and Jains do not eat meat.

LC: Then why did he allow Gautam (Dr Mehta's son) to barbeque chicken and serve it to guests when he organised the New Year's Eve party at his house last year?

Lal Chacha's complaint reached Dr Mehta's ears. This was not surprising, as Lal Chacha had aired his disapproval of the arrangements on various occasions and to various individuals. When Dr Mehta tried to dismiss the matter, I asked him why he was unwilling to serve meat at the cocktail party when he had allegedly served it at a recent New Year's Eve party. Dr Mehta said:

The question of serving meat in the cocktail party does not arise. It is true that I served meat to guests who attended the New Year's Eve party a few months back but they were all friends from the neighbourhood. Most of them ate meat. The cocktail party is different. Many of my

⁸⁹ While there are instances of Indians adopting vegetarianism to protect wildlife and the environment as in the case of the Bishnois of Rajasthan, and indeed the idea of *ahimsa*, central to Buddhism, Jainism and Hinduism, is about kindness to all living things, these worldviews continue to be expressed through the language of religion - of sin and virtue. Similarly, while Ayurveda underpins everyday food practices of Hindus it does so by embedding itself within the religious ethos and practice and not independently as a medical discourse. .

relatives will be present; there will be guests from the bride's family. I cannot be seen to be serving meat in my house in front of my relatives.

The close relationship between meat and alcohol is not only confined to the weekend parties of the young; it has come to symbolise good times, hospitality and celebration in general. Whether hosting guests or celebrating a birthday, promotion or other happy event, the celebration is not complete unless accompanied by meat and alcohol:

Manoj came to me early on in my stay and asked me if he could organise a small party for his visiting brother-in-law (sister-in-law's husband) at my place. I could see that Manoj was anxious about the visit and that he wanted to convey a certain impression about himself and his lifestyle to the visiting brother-in-law.⁹⁰ Manoj also invited some of our common friends to the party. In the evening Manoj arrived with his brother-in-law, a bottle of blended Scotch whisky and fried fish and some other snacks prepared at home. Govind cooked chicken in my kitchen. The evening, an all-male affair, was conducted over meat and alcohol and was centred on gossip, small talk, and lewd poetry and anecdotes. The next day Manoj and his brother-in-law left for Mussoorie for a boys' outing. Manoj had kept aside another bottle of whisky for this occasion. Manoj and his brother-in-law stayed in a tourist hut in the mountains where the evening was spent drinking and eating meat.

4.5.2 Traditional celebrations and secular celebrations

For the sake of convenience, celebrations among Hindus in north India can be divided into two categories: religious and secular. Religious celebrations are based in ritual and mark religious festivals and life-cycle events such as birth, *upanayana* (thread ceremony, for upper-caste Hindu men), marriage and death. The ritualistic nature of these celebrations and the role of religion and the presence of deities in such celebrations⁹¹ dictate that meat and alcohol cannot be served. If anything, the observance of rituals in such ceremonies has become more deliberate and elaborate, as is evident in the correct setting up of the venue (*vastu*), the meticulously planned meals and emphasis on observing as many rituals as possible. Often these celebrations are an occasion to display the wealth and cultural rootedness of the host family.

⁹⁰ Manoj's brother-in-law works for the Police Service and is, as such, in a prestigious government job. Manoj works for an NGO, which, while respectable, does not have the same prestige and power. Manoj and his brother-in-law are both from Kshatriya castes where drinking, hunting and eating meat are considered manly engagements and are often deliberately practiced in an exaggerated manner.

⁹¹ Many Hindus believe that Gods are physically present at such celebrations and feasts.

However, given the close association between meat, alcohol and celebration, ritual feasts, which do not have alcohol or meat, are often considered a ‘necessity’ rather than a true celebration. Instead, the celebration takes place at another time before or after the ritual event and accompanying feast. Cocktail parties offer one such platform.

Cocktail parties have become popular in the last decade. Previously only hosted by rich, westernised and therefore ‘culturally compromised’ Indians cocktail parties are now common in middle-class households, especially at the time of birthdays and weddings⁹². Alcohol and snacks, vegetarian and meat-based, are the mainstay of such events. Although women may attend them, these events are organised for close male friends and relatives. As mentioned above, wedding feasts among north Indian Hindus do not allow for the serving of meat or alcohol. However, as the belief that there cannot be a celebration without meat and alcohol has increasingly gained social acceptance, the hosts organise a cocktail party before the wedding to circumvent the ritual restrictions on meat and alcohol. The groom’s family generally hosts the cocktail party. If alcohol and meat are markers of celebration, then it is only fit that in a patriarchal society that privileges male children, the groom’s family should host the cocktail party; in this system a boy’s wedding is an occasion for celebration, a girl’s is simply the discharge of an obligation.

In addition to religious festivals and ritual celebrations, secular celebrations have become increasingly popular in urban north India. Birthday parties, Christmas and New Year’s Eve are well established, while Valentine’s Day, wedding anniversaries and Father’s Day, and many others, are also gaining in popularity. As these secular occasions are not embedded in a wider cultural context, and because there are no stories to underpin them, their celebration is open to invention and improvisation. In the absence of an established set of practices around these celebrations, they have been colonised by alcohol and meat. Indeed, it is commonly believed that alcohol and meat are embedded in these celebrations in their countries of origin – developed western countries. This idea, reinforced by images selectively aired on television and in movies, has rapidly surged through Indian society so that today New Year’s Eve and Christmas Eve celebrations are a licence to indulge in meat and alcohol, and organise loud parties.

It was decided by popular opinion that my house would be the venue for the Christmas Eve party. Some of my Christian friends from Australia were visiting with their families and local friends wanted to

⁹² This change and other such changes point to the changing ideas and notions of middle class respectability in which meat, alcohol, and public use of alcohol are increasingly more acceptable.

organise a Christmas party for them. All arrangements would be taken care of collectively. I was asked to cook dahl Bukhara, a creamy, tomato-based lentil preparation and steamed rice and arrange for alcohol. Madhvan would do chicken tikka and paneer tikka on the grill, Manoj and Govind would prepare mutton curry, Anoushka would make a pasta salad, and naan would be ordered from outside. In addition there would be standard snacks to go with drinks, and soup and fruit juice for those who do not drink.

By the evening of the 24th fairy lights and other Christmas decorations had been put in place. There was a sound system connected to a laptop ready to play Christmas carols. Anoushka was giving final touches to a *rangoli* (a Diwali motif made on the floor) right in front of a Christmas tree put together by Madhvan. The food was in place. I had done my bit of cooking. Mutton had been prepared at the NGO office by Govind under Manoj's supervision. The grill had finally been lit after many failed attempts and Madhvan was ready to put skewered marinated pieces of chicken and paneer and vegetables on the grill. The bar was open and the guests were beginning to arrive in numbers.

Soon after dark Manoj lit the bonfire. People started to congregate around it drinks in hand. The women were indoors, seated on sofas and divans, sipping tea and nibbling on snacks. As the evening progressed and men got drunk (some women agreed to try mulled wine), women guests were invited to have dinner by the older men. Soon there was a group of women and children at a large table laden with food in the centre of the hall. There was already a lot of food on the table when Dr Karim and his wife arrived with a large pressure cooker of mutton biryani.

The women and children had their dinner while men kept drinking by the bonfire, reaching out, every now and then, for a piece of meat. And then one after the other women left with children until only men were left, drinks and meat in hand. Madhvan's lack of experience with the grill led to a fiasco—the paneer tikkas, too close to the embers, were badly burnt. Luckily for him not many noticed—they were both indifferent to a vegetarian snack and too drunk to take note of the state of paneer tikka. The evening had turned to early morning when the grilled chicken ran out and the male guests, staggering but happy, made their way to the dining area for dinner. Most protested that they did not want any dinner, that it was late and that they had already eaten too much. Some complained that Madhvan had grilled 'way too much' chicken and that if they were not in a position to have dinner he was to be blamed. The next morning, clearing up the remains of the night before, I realised that there was no grilled chicken left - from the 7 kg that Madhvan had grilled, the two pressure cookers of mutton curry had been left untouched while only women and children had eaten dhal and other vegetarian dishes. Dr Karim's mutton biryani pressure cooker had been polished clean.

Later in the day I received a phone call from Govind. He wanted to know what I planned to do with the leftover mutton. Some of his and Manoj's friends from Srinagar were coming over for a few days.

Mutton would do very well for a welcome dinner. I asked him to come over. He arrived within the next fifteen minutes. I pointed out that there was also a lot of dahl and other vegetarian food left. Govind, however, was reluctant: 'There is so much mutton here; who is going to have dahl'. He would be happy to take all the leftover mutton and rice if I did not want it. Then, as an afterthought, he remembered that one of his guests was a vegetarian. As if to make amends for this slip he quickly packed some leftover dahl, asked for a bottle of whisky, promised to replace it, and left on his motorbike.

4.5.3 Celebrations, meat and the dilemma of a vegetarian household

While alcohol has near universal appeal in Dehradun, meat becomes contested terrain when vegetarians host the celebrations. In such instances, if meat is served, it is rarely cooked at home. It is either cooked elsewhere or ordered from outside and served separately from vegetarian food. This allows vegetarians to maintain their 'distance' from meat while ensuring meat is available for those who want it.

It was agreed by Dr Mehta's friends that the New Year's Eve party would be organised, once again, at his house. Once again the issue of meat—whether it would be served—came up and once again Dr Mehta said that there would be no meat at the party. There would of course be plenty of vegetarian food and alcohol, music and a bonfire but not meat. Both of Dr Mehta's sons eat meat; they often order home delivery of meat dishes when visiting their parents. Dr and Mrs Mehta do not appear to mind this. On numerous occasions Dr Mehta had talked about the temptation that meat triggered in him as a young man.

The reason for not allowing meat was that his daughter-in-law, Anvita, the wife of his older son, Gautam, was accompanying her husband on this visit. Gautam and Anvita had been married for less than one year and already tension in their marriage was starting to manifest itself. Anvita is a practicing Jain and as such meat and eggs are unacceptable to her. Gautam, on the other hand, relishes meat of all kinds. This was one of the reasons for marital discord between them. Mrs and Dr Mehta were concerned about this discord and had advised Gautam on numerous occasions to stop eating meat. They were keen that their son's marital life should be happy. Dr Mehta did not want to increase the tension between the married couple by serving meat in a party organised by him. Unstated but perhaps an important consideration was his own image should people of Dr Mehta's community find out that he served meat in his house.

But how could there be a New Year celebration without meat, especially for the more enthusiastic meat eaters? In the end a compromise was reached: Lal Chacha offered to cook chicken in his house and bring it over to Dr Mehta's house. The meat preparation would not be allowed inside the compound of the house but would be served at the main gate to the compound.

Lal Chacha bought three kilograms of chicken from Ram Market. His houseboy Mahendra, a vegetarian and with no prior experience of cooking meat, prepared three kilograms of semi-dried chicken under Lal Chacha's supervision. As the party commenced Mahendra transferred a portion of the cooked chicken to a casserole (a term used to describe an insulated hot case) and carried it to Dr Mehta's house.⁹³ Once there, Mahendra stood at the gate to the compound and waited for guests to come out and partake of the chicken. And they came in ones and twos, holding their drinks, picked up pieces of meat with their fingers, pulled the meat off the bone, threw the bone away and then went for more. When the contents of the casserole started to deplete, Mahendra was sent to get fresh supplies. This cycle was repeated a few times. Guests would walk to the gate, pick up a few pieces of meat, discard the bones next to where they stood and walk back to the bonfire.

The female guests did not make the trips to the meat 'vendor' stationed outside the gate. Perhaps they were not informed or perhaps they were but decided not to join in the carnivorous feast. Among those who made frequent visits to the gate to indulge in the chicken feast were the two sons of Dr Mehta, Gautam and Amit. While Amit ate next to the gate, Gautam took the extra precaution of stepping behind a parked car with a portion of meat and wiping his face twice before returning back in. His wife was around and Gautam could not be too careful.

In the case of vegetarian households the act of preparing and/or serving meat is an attempt to simultaneously inhabit and balance the multiple social worlds that they inhabit. There is the world, the inner and the immediate, in which consumption of meat is morally, culturally and ideologically wrong. This private world is surrounded by other, different, worlds that have come to bear upon it, juxtaposed to it by forces beyond one's control. Vegetarian households that serve meat negotiate between these worlds: the desire to remain true and, equally importantly, appear to remain true to what one was raised knowing, and the need to accommodate different social and culinary practices so as not to stand out, to accept and be accepted. In this arrangement, identities become context specific, assumed after a careful cost-benefit analysis of being one or the other.

Given that alcohol and meat are such value-laden and symbolic items of consumption in the north Indian Hindu context, serving them to guests is symbolic of a close relationship between the host and the guests. People such as Dr Mehta cannot offer alcohol and meat openly; but given the close association between celebration and meat and alcohol, they

⁹³ Lal Chacha lives in the same street as Dr Mehta, less than 100 meters from his house.

often *have* to be offered. In this case, meat and alcohol are served discreetly, and only one's closest friends and family are invited. This is in direct contrast to the practice in western societies, where close friends and family are invited to *meals*, while a much larger group of acquaintances is invited for drinks and canapés (Douglas, 1972).

4.5.4 All-pervading meat and alcohol, and what was once Gandhian

The use of alcohol and meat in hospitality is so pervasive that it is not confined only to celebrations and parties. Official dinners are also deemed incomplete without alcohol and meat. Dehradun has a large number of NGOs, which often host official dinners. The emergence of NGOs in India is owed in large measure to the desire to develop an alternative or third sector (as opposed to the government sector and private business sector) with the aim of working on social issues and with the less-privileged sections of society, especially in remote and rural areas. As such, many NGOs were driven, at least in the beginning, by the Gandhian philosophy of self-sufficient and empowered village republics. In line with Gandhian ideals, many NGOs also advocated and practiced vegetarianism and abstinence from alcohol.

Informed by these Gandhian ideals, the canteens of NGOs served basic vegetarian food and one was expected to wash one's plate after the meal. The guesthouses and campuses of NGOs did not allow alcohol or meat. Many still don't. However, starting in the 1980s and progressively thereafter, NGOs were increasingly used to implement large projects funded by the government or multilateral organisations such as the World Bank. These large projects required many well-paid staff. Many NGOs grew in size on the back of such projects, and gradually diluted the Gandhian ideology that first provided their driving force in favour of expansion and self-preservation. Raising funds to stay in business became central to the operational strategy of many NGOs. This required networking, which required entertaining people who mattered. Soon, lavish drink parties followed by grand dinners became a standard feature of NGO conferences and get-togethers. It is believed that the success or failure of a conference hinges on how satisfied the participants are with the hospitality extended to them. Drinks and dinner play an important part in this.

4.5.5 Punjabi food: The rise of a celebratory cuisine

While the close association between meat and alcohol on the one hand and celebration, festivity, and hospitality on the other may not be altogether new, its mass appeal today is

certainly a novel social phenomenon in India. While factors such as increased affluence, the relaxation of social sanctions against meat and alcohol, geographical mobility and urban anonymity may have contributed to this change, the rise of Punjabi and Mughlai⁹⁴ food as the pan-Indian food of choice has also played a central role in the emergence of meat as a marker of a good time (Nandy, 2004). Indeed, the popularity of Punjabi food has corresponded with the emergence of the Punjabi culture as the dominant culture in India, especially in north India. This dominance is evident in the food served on special occasions; the music played in discos, at weddings and other social gatherings; in the street dances; and in the colloquial language used across north India.

Historically, because Indian cuisine was regional and caste-based, rather than one national cuisine, celebratory food was an extension of the everyday food, with a celebration meaning only a greater variety and quantity of the same food (Nandy, 2004). The emergence of Punjabi cuisine as the cuisine of choice for celebratory meals such as wedding feasts and birthday dinners has thus decoupled celebratory food from everyday food. Celebratory food is now *different* from what one eats every day at home. The film industry and the associated music industry, long dominated by actors, directors and producers from Punjab, have played an instrumental role in establishing the dominance of Punjabi culture, and thus Punjabi cuisine, in north India. However, western influence has also contributed to the privileging of Punjabi food as the ‘celebratory’ Indian food.

The Punjabis were among the first people to emigrate from India to Europe and North America, where many opened Indian restaurants and takeaways, popularising Mughlai/Punjabi food as the ‘authentic’ Indian food. This authenticity was then projected back to India. The demand in the west for Punjabi cuisine was not only because they were the first movers. The Gujaratis had migrated as early as or earlier than the Punjabis, but their vegetarian cuisine did not have the same appeal in the western market as did Punjabi cuisine. The Punjabi cuisine thrived because it could highlight and effectively sell the meat component of the cuisine.

⁹⁴ Once associated with the Great Mughals and the Muslim aristocracy of north India, this food has now become synonymous with the Punjabi cuisine, perhaps except in cities like Lucknow and Hyderabad, where the last remnants of the medieval Indo-Islamic culture may still be seen.

4.5.6 Identity formation

Based on my observations, Hindu meat eaters in north India do not consume meat often, and when they do the quantity is small. Therefore, it is not meat per se that is important, but the idea of eating or not eating meat. Where meat continues to have great symbolic importance, its avoidance or consumption plays an important part in identity formation. Historically, these identities were identities of region, caste and gender. Today, while caste and gender remain important, other identities—environmentalist, modernist, consumerist and so on—are also signalled by the consumption of meat or its avoidance. Until recently, consumption of chicken was not a factor in creating categories among north Indian Hindu meat eaters. Now, with the emergence of chicken as the most widely available and commonly consumed meat, consumption of mutton is used as a criterion to distinguish ‘true’ meat eaters from novices. The idea of the discerning meat eater, who can expound on the subtleties of the quality of meat and the standard of meat preparation, assumes significance in this context.

While the quantities of meat consumed may be small, they are nevertheless rising, as evident in statistics provided by the NSSO and Food and Agriculture Organization. The demand for animal products in general and meat, especially poultry, in particular is growing. The process of the normalisation of meat, evident in the proliferation of shops selling cooked and uncooked meat, started during the colonial period. Normalisation of meat through greater exposure to it has affected both vegetarian as well as meat-eating households. For vegetarian households, it has significantly changed the meaning of what it means to be a vegetarian. While until the 1980s there was a clear consensus that a vegetarian household did not consume any meat or eggs, and did not permit these items in their houses, eggs are now an acceptable item of food in many vegetarian households. Home delivery of food, both vegetarian and meat-based, from restaurants and takeaways, a relatively recent phenomenon, has further stretched the definition of what it means to be a vegetarian household. A number of ‘vegetarian’ households have members who consume meat and order cooked meat from outside. Yet such households ‘maintain’ and proclaim their vegetarian status on the basis that meat is not cooked at home.

For those who come from meat-eating households too, the proliferation of outlets selling cooked and uncooked meat and the ubiquity of meat have altered their attitudes to it. While meat continues to enjoy an exalted place in the food hierarchy, it is no longer consumed only at home and on weekends with family members and friends. While it is

still cooked at home on weekends, it may also be cooked on other days, particularly if there is a special occasion or a visitor at home. The key change here is the frequency with which meat is cooked, primarily on the back of improved availability, increased income and the favourable relative price of meat compared to other food items. This normalisation through accessibility is a double-edged sword in that it has also reduced the shine and prestige of meat, recalling Manoj's reference to meat being like potato now.

As discussed at length in the preceding sections, the flourishing of the practice of eating out and the practices of increased casual consumption of meat have complemented each other in a kind of 'virtuous cycle'. People eat more meat and eat it more often because the practice of eating in public places has taken deep roots. At the same time a desire to consume meat preparations, not available on demand at home, has popularised the practice of eating out and has generated more business for food outlets. Whether eating in a restaurant or by the roadside, in a food court in a shopping mall or at a McDonald's, meat is available in various forms and at various prices. It could be an elaborate dish in an upmarket restaurant, or a hearty meal in an eatery. Meat could be consumed as a part of a social evening with a group of friends, or as a quick bite from a stall before going back to work or classes. The reasons for the movement of meat consumption from the household to the market include necessity, in the case of a student in rented guest accommodation or for those living in vegetarian households; sociality, for young men and women needing a place to meet; and as an expression of identity, as in the practices of 'modernity' involved in going to a mall and eating in a food court. The movement may have been fuelled by necessity of working away from home, growing individualism or increased disposable income, or driven by advertisers. All of these reasons explain some part of the phenomenon, but none suffices as an explanation by itself.

While in certain communities meat has been cooked to celebrate festivals and host relatives and important guests, its role in celebrations today is more pervasive than before. There may be economic reasons for this, but the idea of festivity itself has also changed. The ritual-based festivity in which meat and alcohol had no role has been replaced by a more secular idea of festivity and celebration centred on meat and alcohol. Such festivities are often outside the house and exclude the larger family. When engaged in at home, these festivities are usually sharply segregated by gender. Festivity is now a license to 'have a good time', unencumbered by obligations to family and customs (Pandey 2015). Vegetarians and non-drinkers complain of being overlooked, under-catered for and generally ignored. Women too feel ignored. Further, under this new arrangement, men

who do not eat meat and drink alcohol are emasculated and placed in the category of women and children.

The close link between meat, alcohol and celebration, like most other things, cannot be explained by any one factor but via a number of partial explanations simultaneously invoked. The masculine nature of the new celebrations, ideas about what is masculine and what masculine people do, increased incomes, the relaxation of social norms, individuality, and mass-produced ideas about how to celebrate have all contributed to these social phenomena and in doing so redrawn old identities and created new ones among north Indian Hindus.

CHAPTER 5: (RE-)CREATING IDENTITIES— RENUNCIATION AND ADOPTION

As explained in the preceding chapters, vegetarianism became the ideologically dominant model of food practice in Brahminical Hinduism in response to the challenge of Buddhism and Jainism, both of which preached non-violence towards living beings or *ahimsa*, and thus vegetarianism. Over time, this food practice entrenched itself, acquired religious sanctions, became synonymous with Brahminical Hinduism and acquired a ritually high status. According to the logic of this food practice, bodily purity could not be maintained if the food consumed to nourish the body was not pure; ritual purity was maintained and enhanced by the purity of food consumed. However, despite the dominance of vegetarianism as the desired mode of being and its close association with Hinduism, in reality it was just one of the many models of food practices in Hindu society (Zimmermann, 1987).

By exploring the ways in which consumption of meat or its avoidance is used as a marker of identity—whether as a subversive act of reclaiming a so called ‘immutable identity’ such as caste by consuming forbidden meat, or to mark important occasions or periods in one’s life such as mourning or aging by turning to vegetarianism, thus signifying a change in identity—food, and particularly meat with its high symbolic importance for Hindus, is one of the many tools used to create and re-create their social identities.

5.1 Meat and the Identity Politics of Caste

5.1.1 Highest caste v dominant caste

While Brahmins are ritually the highest caste group in Hinduism, their status in the secular world is not always commensurate to their status in the ritual hierarchy. In everyday matters and worldly affairs, they are often secondary to other castes, which are lower than Brahmins in the ritual hierarchy. M.N. Srinivas (1959)⁹⁵, the Indian sociologist, coined the phrase ‘dominant caste’ to explain this disjunction between the ritual and secular worlds.

⁹⁵ Srinivas first came up with the idea of dominant caste in the course of doing fieldwork in 1953.

The dominant caste in a geographical area usually occupies a middle rank in the caste hierarchy, has a comparatively large population size and exercises control over land and the other means of production in the area, making it the politically and economically dominant caste group. Such caste groups often, though not always, consume meat as part of their overall food practices, with this consumption justified by reference to the characteristics of these caste groups. For example, Rajputs, the Kshatriya caste from the western Indian state of Rajasthan and parts of Gujarat, regularly consume meat. This is justified by citing their martial tradition, which demanded the hunting of animals as part of battle preparedness and thus their necessary consumption. In the hierarchy of food, meat is considered *rajsik*, associated with kings and royals because of the close association of meat with the food requirements and practices of kings and other ruling elites.

Historically, even though many caste groups consumed meat and may have considered it superior to vegetarian food—for vegetarian food was associated with non-violence and non-martial attributes, looked down upon by the Hindu ruling elite who never fully accepted the concept of *ahimsa*—there was even among these groups a recognition that vegetarian food was the desirable practice and had the stamp of religious approval. Doron (2010), in his work on the practices of consumption of alcohol among the boatmen of Banaras, notes:

Interestingly, on one occasion, a boatman drew parallels between the boatmen's regular consumption of meat and alcohol and their low social and ritual status...it is because Mallahs eat different kinds of food, including *tamasic* food such as fish and meat, that inspires them to drink (and use) much alcohol...if their community would take to eating only *satvic* (pure, clean) food like *dahi* (yogurt) and *kirra* (cucumber), their thinking would also change and they would refrain from drinking – because *satvic* food is loved by the gods while *tamasic* food is the food of demons. (p. 291)

Members of Hindu castes that ate meat often avoided it on certain days, at certain times every year, and at some stages of life. For example Mr Rathour, who has always eaten meat, abstains on Saturdays in honour of the God Shani. This abstention is strictly adhered to without exception. Moreover, certain meats were avoided even by Hindu castes that consumed meat. Beef was avoided because cows were considered sacred and killing them for meat was a sin.

5.1.2 (Re)claiming identity—The caste politics of meat

The above description of the consumption of meat and its avoidance holds true more for caste (high-caste) Hindus than for low-caste Hindus. Historically, low-caste Hindus did not face the same restrictions on food practices as did caste Hindus. Nor could they afford to observe these restrictions as most low-caste Hindus were and continue to be very poor.

Not only have low-caste Hindus traditionally eat meat, they also could not be selective about what meat they would eat, nor the days when they would eat meat or avoid its consumption. They reared pigs and ate pork, which many caste Hindus avoided eating because, while Hinduism does not impose sanctions on pork as does Islam, it was nevertheless considered not as clean as other meats. Low-caste Hindus also skinned dead cows and buffaloes and ate their meat. Leather and leather goods were made by low-caste Hindu groups, as skin and leather were considered polluting by caste Hindus⁹⁶.

Due to the stigma attached to the consumption of the meat of cattle in general and dead animals (not killed for meat, but dead for some other reason) in particular, and its association with low-caste Hindus and abject poverty—often related social features in India—low-caste group members who ate beef would stop consuming it when they could afford to do so. Often, the conditions required for improved access to food and came through migration and associated improvement in the economic conditions of these caste groups. The main motivation for stopping the consumption of beef by these low-caste groups was that consumption of such meat reinforced their ritually impure status and associated marginalisation and social exclusion.

Devidhura near Lohaghat in Champawat district of Kumaon Himalayas is famous for the Bagwal fair held each year on the day of *Rakshabandhan*⁹⁷ at the Barahi Devi [goddess] temple. In this fair opposing groups of men carry stones and shields. Each group pelts the opposing group with stones while protecting itself from stones pelted at it. On this day, and as part of the rituals associated with the fair and worship of the *devi* (goddess) buffaloes are sacrificed. This is an old practice involving a few local villages. With growing protests against

⁹⁶ These depictions of low caste Hindus are stereotypical and outdated, particularly in India today where low caste Hindus hold prominent positions across all spheres of the economy and public life. I have included these descriptions not to reinforce these stereotypes but to illustrate to a reader unfamiliar with Hinduism the ritual purity and impurity associated with meat and its relevance to the caste hierarchy.

⁹⁷ Rakshabandhan is a Hindu festival observed in the month of August. Sisters tie wrist bands around the wrists of brothers to mark their relationship and, in return, brothers give gifts to their sisters and promise to look after them and protect them from all dangers.

animal sacrifice this old practice is coming under strain not only in Devidhura but also in places like Bunkhal (in Pauri Garhwal district of Uttarakhand) where a fair is organised in the months of November–December and buffaloes are sacrificed to Kalinga, the reigning *devi* of the area. Another issue that threatens the continuation of these fairs is the difficulty in the disposal of the dead animals as the low-caste residents of the area who would historically take them away and eat the meat no longer do so. They can afford to eat better food and consider the old practice of carrying away for food dead buffaloes sacrificed and left by caste Hindus as demeaning and stigmatising. The rotting carcasses are a health and safety hazard. (discussion with Govind)

The argument then is that low-caste groups would prefer not to consume beef to emulate the practices of the higher castes, and to reduce the severity of the social stigma attached to them. However, the reality of beef consumption and the attitudes towards it by the lowest Hindu castes are more complex than this.

5.1.3 Beef eating as a marker of identity

Staples (2008) discusses the significance of beef to low-caste Hindu converts to Christianity in south India as a marker of their new non-Hindu identity and rejection of Hinduism and a signifier of their social superiority and modernity. Chigateri (2008) documents the consumption of beef by low-caste Hindu groups in Bangalore to highlight how some of these low-caste groups have adopted the consumption of beef as part of ‘*dalit* politics of food [which] ... subverts and disrupts the associations between beef eating and the violence of untouchability’ (p. 11). The organisation of ‘beef eating festivals’ across university campuses in south India is, similarly, an effort by low-caste Hindu groups and minorities to reclaim and celebrate their food practices while challenging the hegemonic food discourse and practices of Brahminical Hinduism.

Just as the consumption of meat in general, and beef in particular, by the low castes is being openly adopted as a tool to reclaim identity and resist hegemonic cultural practices, vegetarianism is also being adopted by many socially marginalised *adivasi* (indigenous) groups in central India. The changes in the food practices of these groups are often attributed to the growing influence of right-wing Hindu groups and the Hindu nationalist movement in the *adivasi* communities though Desai (2008) argues that such macro-level factors may be inadequate and inaccurate in understanding the motivation for changes in the food practices of these ‘subaltern’ groups. Instead, he suggests looking for reasons

for change in food practices that are in the self-interest of individuals. The adoption of vegetarianism by individuals in such groups is often a strategic choice.⁹⁸

5.1.4 Ambivalence among high-caste Hindus

The attitude of high-caste Hindus towards meat consumption is similarly contradictory to that of low-caste Hindus and *advisais* towards beef. Donner (2008) discusses the extension in high-caste Bengali families of the strict dietary regimen of avoidance of meat, once applicable only to widows, to younger women and especially young mothers. Caplan (2008) cites instances from her fieldwork in Chennai in south India where some Brahmin participants, strictly vegetarian at home, consumed meat outside the house, especially when eating with meat-eating non-Brahmin colleagues. Michelutti (2008) documents consumption of meat and alcohol by Yadavs in Mathura in north India. Finally, Mookherjee (2008) touches upon the consumption of beef outside the house by young high-caste Hindus in Calcutta (now Kolkata) in pursuit of ‘modernity’.

In reality then, the divide in food practices between vegetarian and non-vegetarian individuals and caste groups is not clearly defined. It has become more complicated with the increased role of individual choice in determining people’s food preferences. However, this does not mean that tradition, underpinned by religion, no longer plays an important role in everyday food practices.

5.2 Fieldwork—Changing Practices Observed within Households

In the course of my fieldwork, I came across nine individuals from four families who had given up eating meat⁹⁹ even though they had previously been meat eaters. I came across five other individuals from four families who had started to eat meat, despite having been born and brought up in vegetarian households.¹⁰⁰ Even more had experimented with egg. There were three households that had become ‘vegetarian households’ because of their wives’ preferences¹⁰¹ and two in which the wife insisted on cooking and eating meat.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Members of the group studied by Desai converted to vegetarianism after joining a Hindu religious sect with the aim to protect themselves from witchcraft and black magic.

⁹⁹ Manish’s grandmother, Madhvan’s brother-in-law and sister, Manoj’s parents, Badreesh [a lodger at Dr Mehta’s house] and Nivedhitha, Manish’s wife and Govind’s wife.

¹⁰⁰ Pande’s son, Pande’s son’s friend (Abhimanyu), Manoj, Amit and Gautam.

¹⁰¹ Manish, Gautam and Govind.

¹⁰² Manoj and Badreesh

However, in most households, and in the case of most members of households, the status quo was maintained—vegetarian households and their members remained vegetarian, and meat-eating households and their members remained meat eating. Any shift to consuming meat was invariably among the younger members of the vegetarian households, while a shift to vegetarianism was independent of age. Each individual had their own reason for changing their food practice.

Gautam's story

I come from a strictly vegetarian family and trained as a chef. I first went to New Zealand in 2000 but did not last more than a week. I felt homesick and completely out of place in New Zealand. I returned back to India. It was a wrong thing to do; I did not realise the importance of PR [permanent residency]. I returned to New Zealand in 2008, better prepared this time and determined to settle down in that country. While 2000 was about 'nationalism' 2008 was about 'rationalism'. I realised there was no future for me in India, at least not in the hotel industry.

I first ate meat in Agra. I was four or five years old then. An uncle [a friend of his father] had hunted and cooked a quail and asked my father if he could give me some to taste. My father did not object and even though my mother did, the uncle gave it to me anyway and I had it. In any case, in our household it has always been about the individual and the choice of the individual. After that I did not eat meat until I went to boarding school, to finish school. We did have eggs at home occasionally but meat was never cooked at home. Once in boarding school I started to eat meat more regularly. First it was only chicken and later other meats. Finally I ate beef for the first time in 1996—and in any case I could not be a chef and cook meat without eating it.

When I moved to New Zealand in 2008, a whole new world opened in front of me. I could be anything and be anybody without being encumbered by my past. That is what I did. I experimented and tried new things, alcohol, food you name it. While studying I started working at an Indian restaurant. In addition to wages we were also given a meal at the end of the shift. The food we would get would depend on what was available. Sometimes it was meat. In any case meat dishes were better than vegetarian dishes. In this way meat consumption became a matter of routine rather than an occasional event. After finishing my university course I moved to take up a job in a resort. After a long wait I was finally financially comfortable. I celebrated this by having a Kobe beef steak. It was very expensive but worth the money I spent. I had heard a lot about it while studying and wanted to try it. When I ate Kobe beef it brought tears to my eyes. This was the best meat money could buy, and I could afford it. My days of hardship were over. I had arrived.

But New Zealand did not work out for me and I moved back to India in 2011. After living with my parents for almost three years I married in 2014 and now live with my wife in Delhi. Even though it is not an arranged marriage we are both Jains. Her family, in keeping with our

tradition, is strictly vegetarian. Initially my wife was comfortable with the arrangement where I occasionally ate meat outside the house so long as I did not cook it at home. Now she has hardened her position and objects to my eating meat even outside the house. It makes me angry; I still eat meat without telling her but she often complains that I smell, especially after I eat meat. I tolerate the situation because every relationship in life is a compromise. You get something and you have to give something. The day I feel I am not getting my worth from this relationship I will review it.

5.2.1 The role of age and gender

Even among those high-caste Hindu groups where consumption of meat is socially acceptable, it is not simply a matter of consuming meat or not consuming meat. Such consumption is often governed by age and gender. In meat-eating castes, older people are more likely to be vegetarian than younger people and a greater proportion of women than men are vegetarian. In many meat-eating communities, the so called fittest members of the community (i.e., the younger men) have the first claim on meat, suggesting that the distribution of meat is governed by practical considerations. However, among meat-eating Hindus, the renunciation of meat by older people and its avoidance by women relates to religion and convention.

Brahminical Hinduism recognises four stages in a person's (particularly man's) life, each associated with certain lifestyle choices. These include *brahmacharya* (bachelorhood), which should be dedicated to accumulating learning and knowledge; *grihastha* (householder), during which time the man's main responsibility is to earn a living and raise a family; *sanyasa* (gradual withdrawal from the world); and *vanaprastha* (renouncing the world and leaving for the forest). These last two stages involve the renunciation of worldly pleasures, including rich food such as meat.

Manish's grandmother is in her seventies. She is an active and sprightly woman who kept her household together and saw her sons through school and university after her husband passed away at a young age. She was the head of the household until Manish's father, the oldest male in the family, married. Unusually for a woman Manish's grandmother would take a keen interest in cooking and eating meat even as late as when Manish was in high school. This may have had to do with the fact that as the head of the household with young children, she had to be both the father and the mother to her sons. However, a few years ago Manish's grandmother stopped eating meat. When asked why she stopped consuming meat her answer varies from the ethical—'I now feel it is wrong to kill animals for food'—to the spiritual—'I want to focus on God and not on the pleasures of the world' or 'I am preparing

for the moment’—the moment being her death, or, as she would say, her ‘union with God’.

All things being equal then, the consumption of meat is often determined by the life stage and gender of the individual. The phenomenon observed by Donner (2008) in which young, high-caste, middle-class Bengali women, especially young mothers, adopted strict vegetarianism might be occurring in north India too. Some of the young women with children who participated in this study were strict vegetarians, despite their husbands eating meat regularly and themselves coming from meat-eating caste groups and households.

Anvita and Anu are both from Kshatriya households from the hills of Uttarakhand. Anvita is married to Manish while Anu is married to Govind also Kshatriyas from the hills of Uttarakhand. Both Anvita and Anu are strict vegetarians even though they come from families in which consuming meat is an accepted and common food practice. However, to these young women and mothers, vegetarianism is a religiously and morally desirable practice, which fosters the welfare of the family (husband and children) by practicing kindness towards all creatures. Killing an animal for food inflicts pain and suffering on the animal and no good can come out of it for the family. They have discouraged Manish and Govind from eating meat at home. As a result meat is no longer cooked at their homes. Manish and Govind continue to eat meat outside the house. But Manish no longer eats meat on Monday as that is the day Anvita fasts and prays to Lord Shiva for the wellbeing of the family: ‘This makes her happy and does not cost me anything. After all, she is doing it for the family. One can doubt the approach but who could question the sentiment behind it. And, in any case, faith, they say, can move mountains’ (Manish).

5.2.2 Abstaining from meat on certain days

Many north Indian Hindus who eat meat often do not eat meat on one or more days of the week. As mentioned above, Manish does not eat meat on Monday because that is the day Anvita fasts. Madhvan does not eat meat on Thursday, as that is the day he prays and fasts. Mr Rathour does not eat meat on Saturday, the day of the God Shani. In Hindu cosmology, each day of the week is named after a planet, each of which is a deity. Tuesday is called Mangal (Mars) in Hindi, Thursday is called Brihaspati (Jupiter) and Saturday is called Shani (Saturn). Further, each day of the week is dedicated to a Hindu God or Goddess. Monday is the day of Shiva, Tuesday of Hanuman and Friday of Shakti, the female divine form represented by various Goddesses.

Many north Indian Hindus fast on a particular day, either because that is the day of their dominant planet as per astrology and their horoscope or because they have special faith

in the God or Goddess to whom the day is dedicated. Many women, particularly young women, fast on Monday to please Shiva, who is believed to help unmarried women find suitable husbands and looks after the welfare of the husbands of married women. As ritual purity is a desirable state, especially for someone who is praying or fasting, and because meat is polluting, Hindus do not eat meat on the days they fast and many also avoid it on the days dedicated to the Gods and Goddesses in which they have special faith. On Tuesdays, Hindus worship Lord Hanuman, the Monkey God, the ‘patron saint’ of wrestlers and bodybuilders. Understandably, it is mostly men who worship Hanuman and thus abstain from meat on Tuesdays. In yet another practice that underlines the masculine nature of meat consumption in India, as Tuesday is the most common day that men abstain from meat, many meat shops stay closed.

In addition to weekly abstinence, there are also other days in the year when many Hindus do not consume meat. Religious festivals and the feasts associated with them are occasions when only vegetarian food is cooked. While meat and alcohol have become synonymous with celebration and may be consumed in the days preceding the festival, the feast on the day of the festival is generally vegetarian. *Diwali* (the festival of lights), *Holi* (the festival of colours), the births of Krishna and Rama and the wedding night of Shiva are all marked by celebrations and feasts, but the food prepared is vegetarian.¹⁰³

Similarly, feasts that mark life-cycle events and associated rituals, such as birth, *namkaran* (the naming ceremony), *annaprashan* (the first offering of grain to a young child), *mundan* (the shaving of the head of a young child), *upanayana* (sacred thread ceremony), marriage and death are all vegetarian. All these occasions and associated feasts involve Gods and Goddesses and are centred on rituals and religious ceremonies. The purity of the food cooked on such occasions is essential for the success of the rituals. Polluting items such as meat and alcohol cannot be served.

After his son’s wedding Mr Pandit hosted a reception for his newly wed son and daughter-in-law. This is also called ‘At Home’ in north India. As Mr Pandit had worked with Dr Mehta and, as a fellow Hill Brahmin, knew Lal Chacha’s family well Mr Pandit invited both Lal Chacha and Dr Mehta to the reception. The following morning the reception was the topic of discussion over tea.

¹⁰³ While most religious feasts among Hindus are vegetarian, this is not invariably the case. Nepalis, Rajputs and some other martial groups observe *Vijaydashmi* or *Dussehra* to celebrate their martial tradition. On this day, they worship their weapons. The celebratory feast that marks *Dussehra* in such ethnic groups has meat, often goat’s meat, as an integral part.

Meat and alcohol had been served at the reception. However, this in itself was not the matter for discussion as hosting guests 'well' before or after the marriage by offering them meat and alcohol is now a norm. Dr Mehta couched his observations in a politically correct tone. He praised Mr Pandit for serving good quality whisky to his guests, 'a clear sign of refinement and taste'. However, serving meat took away from the party instead of adding to it. When meat is served, the hosts neglect vegetarian food while focusing on the meat dishes. They assume that all vegetarian food is the same while meat best brings out the lavishness and extravagance of a feast. This is evident in the deserted and desolate look that the vegetarian section wears. Vegetarians feel left out while meat eaters congregate around the tables serving 'non-veg' dishes. This is rather disruptive to the gathering.

Lal Chacha, on the other hand, talked about the excellent catering and the lavish spread of meats and other dishes; in addition to good alcohol, of course. Neither bothered to inquire how Mrs Mehta, who neither drinks nor eats meat, enjoyed the evening.

While these are the norms, not every household feels obliged to observe them. This is when the practices established within a household by design or circumstances overrule the common societal practice. Discretion in practices is on the rise with urban living and the anonymity and nuclear families that have accompanied it.

On the day of Diwali, I received a phone call from Mr Rathour in the evening as we were getting the house ready for Lakshmi Puja. We were invited to his house for a Diwali visit. We quickly performed the Puja at our house and left for Mr Rathour's residence. Mr Rathour's family, which included Mr Rathour, his mother and retired father, his wife and son were assembled in the dining room of the house dressed in their festival clothes, women in silk saris and men in kurta and pyjamas (long loose shirt and trousers) and Jawahar jacket (named after the first Prime Minister of India and resembling a waist coat). Images of various Gods and Goddesses were placed atop a large steel trunk (the kind that one would find in most north Indian houses and used to store quilts and blankets) covered with a cloth. In the centre of this assembly of Gods and Goddesses, and on a pedestal, were seated new idols of Lakshmi (the Goddess of wealth) and Ganesh (the Elephant God who is the remover of obstacles and is the first God to be worshipped). Mr Rathour's mother conducted the Lakshmi Puja. One after the other Mr Rathour's father, he himself, his wife and his son bowed before the assembly of Gods and Goddesses and made an offering even as the mother recited some mantra, tied sacred thread around the wrists of the worshippers, put vermilion dots on their foreheads, and placed sweets in their mouths while the fragrance of cooked meat wafted in from the adjoining kitchen. Later, standing in the courtyard of his house I asked Mr Rathour if they had cooked meat for dinner. 'Mutton', he answered

matter-of-factly. ‘We cook mutton for dinner on Diwali night and play cards.’¹⁰⁴ These are family traditions’.

5.2.3 Abstaining from meat for longer periods

In addition to the days of abstinence, there are various longer periods throughout the year when many meat-eating Hindus do not eat meat. Twice a year, once in March–April and again in September–October, Hindus observe *Navratri*, or the nine nights of the Goddess,¹⁰⁵ coinciding with the onset of spring and autumn, respectively. The Goddess is the mother, the giver of life, and as such is closely associated with spring and autumn, which are themselves associated with birth and regeneration and decay and death, the cycle of life. Many Hindus avoid meat during these two periods. The sale of meat slows, and many meat shops close for part or all of *Navratri*. Restaurants also report a slump in the sale of meat dishes.

Two other extended periods during which many Hindus who consume meat avoid eating it fall quite close to one another. The month of *Sawan* or *Shravan* is the fifth month of the Hindu calendar and one of the most, if not the most, auspicious months. In this 31-day period, which falls in July–August, Hindus worship Lord Shiva. Mondays of *Shravan* are considered particularly auspicious, as Monday is the day of Lord Shiva. Following *Shravan*, there is a 16-day period in September–October when Hindus observe *Pitru Paksha*. During this time, ancestors are remembered, worshipped and offered food. *Shraadh*, a rite related to dead ancestors, is performed during *Pitru Paksha*. As death is considered polluting, this period, just over a fortnight long, is considered inauspicious. Hindus avoid celebrations, starting new ventures, buying new products, and generally anything auspicious or happy. Many Hindus abstain from the consumption of meat during this 16-day period. The food offered to ancestors is simple but clearly specified, and does not include meat.

Many Hindus also avoid meat for one year upon the death of a close relative, especially a mother or father. This is because, among other things, one or more members of the family have to offer prayers regularly for the peace of the departed soul. For this ritual, purity is necessary, which cannot be maintained while consuming meat and alcohol.

¹⁰⁴ It being the festival of the Goddess of Wealth, playing cards on Diwali night is not unusual. In fact it is supposed to bring good fortune. Winning at cards on Diwali night is considered particularly auspicious, a sign of Goddess Lakshmi’s grace.

¹⁰⁵ There are five *Navratri* but only the two mentioned here are commonly and widely observed.

Today, this practice appears to be on the decline under the pressures of modern living, where work, travel and social obligations make observing strict dietary restrictions difficult. The practice appears to be more strictly observed by the Hindus from the hills and those living in rural areas than by Hindus living in urban areas. At the risk of generalising based only on my observations in the course of the fieldwork, I suggest that the processes of urbanisation and ‘modernisation’ have eroded or diluted these practices.

To substantiate this assertion with an example, we can look to the once-common practice of not cooking food for the 13-day period of mourning in a household where a death has occurred. In an urban context, where there are fewer relatives to bring cooked food to the household and those that might live in the same town or city are constrained by work schedule and distance, not cooking food for 13 days is not practical. Thus, this practice of not cooking for 13 days following a death is becoming less common.

Madhvan’s mother passed away in September. He being the elder son, Madhvan performed the last rites and has since then been performing various rites that are performed after the death of a relative. Madhvan has stopped using accessories made of leather including a wallet, belt, and leather shoes and sandals. He abstains from meat, eggs, onion, garlic and alcohol. Madhvan says that he should also abstain from milk and milk derived products in the memory of his mother whose milk nourished him and also from salt (repayment of debt to one’s mother) and spicy food. He tries to observe these restrictions as far as possible but it gets difficult at times, especially when he is travelling or has to eat out. He continues to smoke and have tea and intends to go back to eating meat and consuming alcohol when the one year of mourning and its associated restrictions end.

As I have noted above there are extended periods during which Hindus either do not consume meat or avoid its consumption. But many meat shops remain open, KFC, and McDonalds still flip burgers, and restaurants and home delivery outlets continue to serve customers. While it would be accurate to say that there is decrease in the consumption of meat as reflected in reduced demand for meat in restaurants and from home delivery outlets as well as raw meat purchased from shops as reported by owners of these businesses interviewed during the course of fieldwork, there is today a greater discretion available to individuals.

In the course of fieldwork I visited fast food outlets on religious festivals that are marked by fasting such as *Janamashtmi* (birthday of Lord Krishna), in particular KFC and McDonalds. I found these outlets filled with customers though mostly young customers. Not only were they not fasting, many were consuming meat. The same could be observed

during *Navratra*. Some participants households and individuals observed *Navratra* more religiously than others. Madhvan assiduously avoided meat during *Navratra* while Lal Chacha had few misgivings about consuming it. Alcohol and meat parties continued apace in the NGO office while at participant homes *Navratra* changed the usual practices of meat and egg consumption.

However, it was remarkable that where meat and alcohol were consumed they were consumed either individually or as part of small, intimate group. This was not necessarily to hide the consumption but perhaps in deference to the sensitivities of others around. I suppose it demonstrated tacitly that there was a recognition that the open consumption of meat and alcohol during *Navratra* was socially unacceptable. Large gatherings, for example for a birthday party, were postponed to a later time or took place without meat or alcohol being served.

5.3 The Overlap of Religious and Secular Reasoning

5.3.1 The contextual choices of meat—Unclean pork, but modern ham

When Hindus do eat meat they may still avoid certain meats, such as beef, pork and/or buffalo meat. Principally, this is because beef is sacred to Hindus, pork is considered unclean by many, and buffalo is considered an inferior meat and/or closely related to beef. However, it is possible that the same meat may be eaten in one situation but avoided in another. Many meat eaters relish cold cuts of pig's meat, such as sliced ham, but avoid eating pork curry. Similarly, buffalo meat may be consumed in a Tibetan restaurant but not at a street-side kebab shop in a Muslim neighbourhood.

Particular types of meat can also have conflicting meanings. Pig's meat, which is generally considered unclean and associated with low-caste Hindus, is undesirable, especially when prepared as a curry or using other local recipes. However, the cold cuts of the same pig's meat fetch a high price and are much sought after by westernised upper-middle class Indians. In this case, the same meat assumes meanings of modernity, gourmet eating and a western, secular taste and outlook. Similarly while cow's meat is sacred and buffalo's meat is deemed of low quality and the two may be consumed only by the lowest Hindu castes, beef is served freely in upmarket hotels (five-star hotels in particular), where it is accessible to the very rich for an exorbitant price. Its consumption again can signify wealth, modernity or playing with danger in the act of asserting one's individuality. In this last case, often associated with the urban youth who go looking for

cow's meat in concealed places 'known only to a few', there is a sense of adventure, a culinary rush of adrenalin.

5.3.2 Practical considerations—Kuccha and pucca food

For many meat-eating Hindus, the consumption of meat is regulated by the calendar and life stages. Religion underpins this cycle of consumption and avoidance, and so does medicine. Religion and traditional medicine (*Ayurveda*) are the basis of many of the food practices of Hindus. Often, religion and medicine can become inseparable (Zimmermann, 1987). Hindu food falls under the two main categories of *kuccha* (water-based) and *pucca* (oil-based). *Kuccha* foods are those cooked using water such as rice, lentils and *chapattis*, while *pucca* foods are those cooked in oil such as *pooris* (deep-fried bread). There are greater caste restrictions on *kuccha* food than on *pucca* food in terms of when and where they can be sourced and from whom, and when and where they can be cooked and consumed. While this difference in restrictions can be explained by social and religious practices, the underlying reason may be that water-based food items are more likely to cause infections and spread disease than are deep-fried food items. To avoid this, their consumption had to be more regulated.

5.3.3 Secular lifestyle, health concerns and 'western vegetarianism'

Many Hindus have also been motivated to stop consuming meat by the popularisation of yoga and its associated *Ayurveda* and naturopathy as well as concerns about the effect on health of using fats and meats. The popularisation of yoga has itself relied heavily on access to mass media, especially satellite television and dedicated channels airing programs on Hindu religious discourse, yoga and *Ayurveda*. While several gurus have been engaged in popularising yoga and *Ayurveda* through television and the branding and marketing of Ayurvedic medicines, the name of Baba Ramdev of Patanjali is the most well-known.

Avoiding meat can also be a sign of sensitivity to fellow living beings (as in the case of the Bishnoi community of Rajasthan, a state in western India), of concern for the environment and future generations, and of modern enlightenment. It is associated with an alternative lifestyle, green or environmental movements, and being a responsible global citizen. The last is best reflected in the growing debate on the environmental cost and long-term sustainability of the meat industry, the energy intensity of meat production,

changing approaches to understanding the nature of the man–animal relationship, and the proliferation of animal rights groups and organisations.

While religious factors continue to dominate the food choices of individuals directly or indirectly, there are also more modern and secular reasons for giving up meat. These include concerns for animal rights, the environment, and the assertion of the individual's right to make choices about what one eats. While these ideas have long existed among people in India, as suggested by the case of Manoj's parents who, despite being from a meat-eating Kshatriya caste and being brought up in meat-eating families decided to practice vegetarianism, they were perhaps less common even a decade or two ago as compared to today. This suggests a shift towards a greater ability to choose and a decreased reliance on one's tradition to make choices.

The conscious choice to adopt vegetarianism cannot be explained away by the logic of religion alone; it often has varied, and often, secular reasons. While this aspect of adopting vegetarianism has not been much explored in the context of India, there are numerous studies on vegetarianism and veganism in the west. Although such studies have been conducted in very different social and cultural contexts, they can help in understanding the phenomenon of the conscious choice of vegetarianism in India by providing cross-cultural comparisons and insights.

Ameya [a lodger at Dr Mehta's house] was born to a Kshatriya army officer father and a Brahmin mother. As her father came from a meat-eating culture Ameya grew up eating meat in a household in which meat was regularly cooked. Her mother did not eat meat though. After Ameya's father died of a sudden cardiac arrest her mother continued cooking meat for Ameya and her younger brother. After finishing university Ameya moved to Hyderabad to start work. There she shared an apartment with two other girls who were both her work colleagues. Sometimes they would cook together and at other times eat out. In this new context and away from the context in which she grew up and started to eat meat Ameya started to question why she consumed meat. She did not particularly like meat nor did she miss it. The only reason she ate it was because she had grown up eating it. She started to feel that she did not want to continue eating meat. It did not happen overnight but was a gradual process. While she had not consciously thought of it then Ameya now feels that her interest in environmental issues and love for animals must not have sat comfortably with her status as 'casual carnivore'. Ameya does not eat meat any longer though her mother continues to cook it for Ameya's brother.

5.3.4 Vegetarianism as a political identity

An increasingly common practice is that of giving up meat and alcohol after taking *deeksha*—joining a religious sect such as *Radha Soami Satsang Beas*. Desai (2008) writes about the adoption of vegetarianism and renunciation of alcohol upon joining a religious sect among the *adivasis* of central and western India, a practice that is increasingly popular among middle-class and high-caste Hindus in north India.

Madhvan's brother-in-law and his family, who were 'avid' meat eaters (the brother-in-law would also consume alcohol regularly because of his 'high-pressure police job') took *deeksha* from a Guru and renounced meat and alcohol. They felt that they needed a Guru for peace and calm in an increasingly chaotic world around them and to establish a connection with God.

Madhvan's brother-in-law is now retired from the police force and so must be more than 60 years old, as 60 is the age of mandatory retirement from the civil service. This is not to suggest that only older people join religious sects or look for gurus. Increasingly, there is a general perception that conventional religious arrangements are not working and that there is a need for a personal spiritual and religious guide who can help make sense of the surrounding world. Many of these sects organise regular camps and retreats where they focus on practices of yoga and meditation, simple food, and philosophical and religious explanations of life's troubles, such as the loss of a job, an untimely death, social isolation, neglect by children, illness and so on.

However, for some religious sects, vegetarianism does not stop at being a religious or spiritual practice; for many, vegetarianism is also a political goal. For example, *Gau hatyaron ko phasi do* [Death penalty to those who kill cows] is the most popular slogan of the Jai Gurudev sect of Mathura. These groups have lobbied state and central governments, and have succeeded in persuading these governments, to impose increasingly stringent restrictions on the sale of certain kinds of meats. These groups are also generally believed to be behind the removal of eggs from the midday meal programs of government-funded schools in many BJP-governed states in India, as discussed earlier in this thesis.

5.4 Meat and Individual Identity Formation

5.4.1 The unidirectional nature of acceptable change: Meat eater to vegetarian

As shown so far in this chapter, any meditated change in practice concerning meat consumption among Hindus has historically been unidirectional—meat-eating Hindus stopped eating meat because of either old age or the taking of religious vows. From this perspective, meat avoidance is associated with religion and medicine—with purity, the avoidance of pollution, health and wellbeing. However, it is the movement from vegetarianism to meat eating that is far more talked about today, as it is believed to be a novelty, a recent social phenomenon.

While there may always have been instances of members of vegetarian households and castes consuming meat, in such instances these members would have avoided eating it publicly and generally attempted to conceal their meat eating. Common knowledge of this ‘deviance’ could have disastrous consequences, including loss of caste and social exclusion. When, as a young man, Gandhi first consumed meat, his instinct was to conceal the act; he did not want his parents to find out that he ate meat, knowing that this would cause them immense pain and loss of face. Further, when he went to England for higher studies, he promised his mother that he would not consume meat or alcohol, a promise he kept (Gandhi, 1927/1993).

5.4.2 Contextual identities—The importance of geography

Just as being a meat eater is not a straightforward matter of consuming or not consuming meat but assumes different meanings over space and time, being vegetarian, whether at the level of caste group, household or individual, cannot be simply defined. Theoretically, there is a caste hierarchy in Hinduism supplemented by a hierarchy of food, in which Brahmins as the top caste in the caste hierarchy consume vegetarian *satvik* food, which sits at the top of the food hierarchy. However, in practice, a number of Brahmin castes consume meat. Often, whether a Brahmin caste consumes meat is determined by the geographical region it comes from. Bengali Brahmins consume fish and some meat, while Tamil Brahmins are strictly vegetarian. Brahmins from eastern Uttar Pradesh consume fish and meat, as do Konkani Brahmins from the west coast of India. However, Brahmins from Rajasthan, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh are more likely to be vegetarian.

5.4.3 Group acceptance of meat eating as privileging individual choice

The findings of my fieldwork suggest that the consumption of meat by members of vegetarian households is not only more common but also increasingly more socially acceptable. This acceptance is justified by appeals to individuality ('who can control children; they will do what they want to do'), changing standards ('times have changed') and modernism ('we have to think along modern lines'). Several factors have contributed to the increasing acceptance of meat in the diets of traditionally vegetarian households as well as those who have historically consumed meat. In particular, the decline of joint families and the movement of people, the decline in the practice of endogamy, the desire for better nutrition, and the rise of eating out and home delivery of food from restaurants are some of the notable factors underlying this change in food practices. These themes were explored in Chapter 4.

The improved supply of meat and the increased ability to purchase meat have helped facilitate the shift towards meat eating; any demand without adequate supply will remain as unmet or potential demand. Improvements in the efficiency of the meat industry in general, and the poultry industry in particular, through technological advancement, extension services and economies of scale have translated into increased supply, improved availability and reduced cost to customers. These developments, coupled with an increase in disposable income, have led to increased demand for meat. However, this increased availability and access to meat is only part of the story. As this thesis argues, when we observe the practices of meat consumption today, we can see that meat consumption among north Indian Hindus, with its rich symbolism, is used as a tool to create and re-create social identities.

5.5 What is a Vegetarian Household?

5.5.1 Defining vegetarianism—The importance of eggs

While one can focus on the individual expression of identity as occurring within a more rigid structure, the changing definition of 'vegetarian household' is an illustrative example of how the expression of individual identity can reshape models and definitions previously considered fixed.

As described in earlier chapters, until recently eggs were grouped together with meat and avoided by vegetarians. Egg was not permitted inside vegetarian households. Indeed,

even today there are many Hindu households that practice this stringent definition of vegetarianism, which excludes egg from the diet and places it in the same category as chicken, mutton or any other meat. Other households, while not eating eggs per se, eat bakery and confectionary products such as cakes and pastries in which eggs are an ingredient. Finally, some vegetarian households allow members of the household to consume them. In such households, it is possible to eat eggs and yet maintain vegetarian status. Some of these households may permit the preparation of eggs in the kitchen, often in utensils designated for cooking eggs; others may not permit eggs to be cooked inside the house but allow their consumption outside the house.

While the definition of being a vegetarian has been stretched to a point, as indicated by vegetarianism's relationship with eggs, this flexibility does not extend to even the occasional sampling of meat, such as consuming vegetable soups in restaurants that are known to contain chicken stock. Interestingly, while conducting fieldwork, I saw a young vegetarian partaking of the gravy of a chicken dish while carefully avoiding the pieces of meat. This was quite confusing to the others watching, and clearly not an accepted vegetarian practice. It was no surprise at all to them that some months later the young vegetarian was a declared meat eater.

5.5.2 Defining a 'household'

The above begs the question of what really is a vegetarian household. Normalisation of meat through greater exposure to it has affected both vegetarian and meat-eating households. It has also significantly changed the meaning of what it means to be vegetarian. While there was once a clear consensus that a vegetarian household did not consume any meat or eggs, or permit them in the home, eggs are now an acceptable food item in many vegetarian households. This represents the first stage of normalising animal product consumption (other than dairy products) in vegetarian households. Eggs first made their entry into vegetarian households on the basis of a sustained media campaign, which established eggs in the popular psyche as a 'normal' item of food. Many vegetarian parents with young children started giving eggs to their children to improve their nutritional intake. Today, egg consumption has been normalised to the point that most people would consider an egg-consuming household a vegetarian household.

In the second stage of expanding the definition of vegetarian households, individual members of a vegetarian household start to consume meat outside the home, first secretly and then openly, without causing the household to lose its status as a vegetarian

household. In such cases, meat is neither brought into the house nor cooked in the kitchen, and elders often do not know that individuals are consuming meat outside the home. Finally, in the third stage, a vegetarian household might have cooked meat delivered from outside for consumption by household members or, on rare occasions, cook meat at home for guests, while maintaining its status as a vegetarian household.

When a household claims to be vegetarian despite some of its members consuming meat, a distinction is being made between the household as a collective and individuals. Individuals are free to exercise choice, and their individuality is recognised whether willingly or unwillingly. In such instances, vegetarianism is the dominant state of being in the household, underpinned by caste and traditional culinary practices. Consumption of meat by household members is a deviation from the household norms, a compromise with the changing times.

Dr and Mrs Mehta run a vegetarian household. They are Jains; non-violence and associated vegetarianism is a cornerstone of their religious philosophy. However, when their younger son Amit, an army officer, comes home on leave, the norms of vegetarianism are relaxed. Amit is fond of chicken; his wife Sonia, though a vegetarian herself, does not mind her husband's occasional indulgence. She is not a Jain¹⁰⁶ and therefore, perhaps, feels less strongly about eating meat. A few times during his visit, Amit ordered chicken from a nearby restaurant to be delivered at home. This was mostly dry meat such as chicken tikka—large chunks of marinated and baked meat—which he had with his evening drinks. Dr Mehta himself does not mind eating eggs and regularly gives them to his cocker spaniel, 'Peaches'.

After a few drinks Dr Mehta often recounts how, as a young man, he was strongly attracted to the smell of roasted meat and how after a few drinks with friends he once picked a chicken leg and took it to his mouth—'so strong was the temptation'—but at the last minute his inner voice stopped him from eating it. He, however, never stopped his children from eating anything they wanted to eat. When the children were young they often accompanied Mrs and Dr Mehta to dinners hosted by friends, especially Mr Ram. At such times they wanted to try meat preparations and Dr Mehta did not think it right to stop them. Mrs Mehta, from a conservative Jain family from a small town, first saw her brother eat eggs when he was working on building his muscles. When she married Dr Mehta she saw him have eggs with his drinks and even agreed to have alcohol when her husband pressed it on her. As a new bride she did not have the courage to say no to her husband and so, 'against her wishes, something that no new bride would do today', she agreed to have drinks. Later, once she was sure of her position she stopped drinking. When her children were young she would often make

¹⁰⁶ Sonia is of the Bania caste, which, as explained earlier, is the caste with which Jains are associated.

omelettes for them but she no longer does that: ‘If someone wants to have eggs they can cook it themselves’.

Amit has a slightly different version of the story. In his version Amit first ate chicken, the only type of meat he eats, when he went to Rajasthan to study engineering. The hostel food was terrible. He and a few friends would often go out for meals to escape the terrible food and monotony of hostel life. It was on one such outing that he tasted chicken, first gravy and then meat, from the plate of a friend. He liked the taste and has been eating chicken since. Life in the army, eating in the messes where meat is regularly cooked, also aided the consumption of chicken. Does he think that consumption of meat helps dispel the image of a typical Jain man, placid, non-martial and non-violent, unfit for the armed forces? After all his father, Dr Mehta, often talks about Amit’s cousin, a brigadier in the army, as ‘a perfect soldier who could eat snake (and ate it during his infantry and commando training) and had no qualms about putting down his dog as the dog could not accompany him on a posting’. In response Amit smiles, mumbles something about ‘papa and his ideas’ and shrugs his shoulders.

5.6 The Process of Normalisation

Two main points emerge from the story of the Mehta household. First, the normalisation of meat was a gradual process, which moved forward in incremental stages and in many ways captured the social transformation of the Hindu society. This transformation affected both those households that came from meat-eating traditions and those that came from vegetarian traditions. Transformation and diversification in food practices captured social diversification along the lines of education, occupation, class and location of residence, in addition to pre-existing diversity underpinned by caste and regional affiliations.

The second and related point, to recap the argument made above, concerns the centrality of egg in bringing about the change in the social acceptance of meat. The campaign to encourage people to eat eggs—and to eat more eggs if they already ate eggs—to improve nutrition in the 1970s and 1980s created the possibility for social acceptance of a food item that was until then socially unacceptable for many. Many realised for the first time that new food items, hitherto a taboo, could be introduced into one’s diet. Egg thus primed people to have greater flexibility than hitherto seen in their attitude towards new food items.

5.6.1 Weakening links to the past—Practices rooted in stories

The dilution of the institution of the joint family has played an important role in creating the environment in which meat consumption gained increased social acceptance in some sections of the north Indian Hindu society. The rise of the nuclear family limited socialisation in traditional practices, historically the responsibility of family elders, especially grandparents, and resulted in an associated loss of stories about culture and food. It is not my suggestion here that the classic joint family was the norm among the Hindus of north India. I use the term ‘joint family’ to refer to any family arrangement that was not nuclear and included members other than parents and children, such as grandparents, great uncles and great aunts or even uncles and aunts, living as part of the household. This had implications for the socialisation of young children in the household.

A group’s culture and practices are rooted in stories. Just as Christmas celebrates the birth of Christ, Easter marks the death and resurrection of Christ and Eid-al-Fitr celebrations among Muslims mark the end of Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting, so too do stories underlie festivals and other cultural practices in India. For example, north Indian Hindus do not eat meat during *Navratri*, a period dedicated to the Goddess. On Makar Sankranti, a Hindu festival associated with the northward turn of the Sun after the winter solstice—the day when the Sun visits his son Shani (the closest a character from the Hindu pantheon comes to Satan)—they eat *Khichdi* (a mix of lentils and rice cooked with spices in water) and sesame seed sweets. These stories play a vital role in transmitting cultural practices from generation to generation. In his book *How Societies Remember*, Paul Connerton (1989) focuses on collective social memory and the mechanisms that make it possible:

In such village societies ... the young children were brought up chiefly by their grandparents; so that it is from the oldest members of the household, at least as much as if not indeed more than from their own parents, that the memory of the group was mediated to them ... When the ancient Greeks called stories ‘geroia’, when Cicero called them ‘fabulae aniles’, and when the picture illustrating the *Contes* of Perrault represented an old woman telling a story to a circle of children, they were registering the extent to which the grandmother took charge of the narrative activity of the group. (p. 39)

Among other things, the nuclear family has placed the responsibility of raising and socialising children on parents alone. When both parents work, as is increasingly the case, children spend more time with domestic help than with their parents. The food that they eat is often not their traditional food and when it is, the food is not accompanied by what Connerton (1989) calls ‘commemorative ceremonies’ (p. 41) and ‘bodily practices’ (p.

72) , which would lend it context and meaning. It becomes just another item of food in search of other stories and narratives. Of course, in time new stories are invented to underpin new practices, but when practices become ephemeral the stories need constant reinvention.

These could be stories of sociality (Caplan, 2008) or modernity (Mookherjee, 2008), or companies could reinvent old stories to promote new products, as Coca Cola successfully did with Santa Claus from the beginning of the twentieth century. While in these stories the consumption of certain food items of choice is still justified with the help of a narrative, the narrative itself is flexible, chosen to fit with the proclaimed identity of the individual for whom the narrative is intended. Meat then can be consumed as a sign of modernity or of belonging to a group; it can be as easily given up as a marker of belonging to another group. Above all, it means that practices around food are no longer sacrosanct, as the stories underpinning them are no longer sacrosanct.

5.6.2 Redefining the logic of practice creates new acceptable practices

For many young Hindus, the reason for abstaining from meat during the month of *Sawan* (or *Shravan*) has less to do with this being the month that Hindu's worship Lord Shiva than it does with the month being hot and humid and thus bringing a fear that disease and infection may spread rapidly through food and water. Meat is a particularly potent carrier of infection and disease; therefore, Hindus avoid meat in this month. Similarly, in the new narrative or counter-narrative, Hindus do not eat meat for the nine days of *Navratri* in March–April and September–October not because these days are associated with Hindu Goddesses, but because they coincide with the mating season and the beginning of hibernation and winter migration. The restriction on meat eating is then a restriction on hunting, to allow animals to mate and migrate, to replenish their stocks and keep them viable and sustainable.

Once stories around food practices are stripped of their religious context and reduced to logic and science, they become prescriptions to address a problem. If the problem can be addressed in another way, the restriction or recommendation loses all meaning. For example, if healthy and hygienic meat can be cooked and consumed during the *Shravan* month, there is no need to avoid meat during this period. Likewise, if proper management of animal stocks can maintain the sustainability of the meat supply, there is no need to avoid eating meat during *Navratri*. In this way, the changing narratives of consumption and abstention can be modified to fit with modern, secular, 'rational' identities.

5.6.3 The changing environments of modern life

The rise of nuclear families in urban areas has been associated with a range of social phenomena, which, rather than being discrete, are interrelated and complement one another. These include issues of:

- privacy and anonymity
- dilution of the practice of endogamy
- increased mobility in search of employment and opportunities
- new occupations and work environments, especially in urban areas
- increased socialisation with groups other than kin groups
- reduced dependence on kin groups for social and economic wellbeing
- two income households in which both husband and wife work
- normalisation of eating out and ordering food from outside.

Rapid urbanisation in India and changing economic fortunes were favourable conditions for an increase in the number of nuclear families. As people move away from their homes in search of economic opportunities, they start to live away from their kin group. They cannot always cook and eat at home, which normalises the practice of eating out. Often people consume food with friends and colleagues from other caste groups whose food practices might be markedly different. This normalises differences in food practices and could accelerate the adoption of new food practices. Sometimes this can result in a vegetarian starting to eat meat. Eating outside the house and in the company of non-kinsmen with differing food practices places the control over the food consumed into the hands of the individual and paves the way for potentially greater acceptance of varied food practices.

Living away from home and in the midst of a varied group is also more favourable to exogamy. It is not surprising that the incidence of exogamy is higher in urban India than in the rural areas of the country. Marrying a person from another caste group or region adds further to the flexibility in food practices of the individuals concerned and the households they establish. The children of such couples are more likely to be introduced to varied food practices than those children born to endogamous parents. When it comes to food practices, exogamy can be influential beyond the immediate nuclear family. If an individual has lived in a social context in which everyone is vegetarian, they are more likely to be averse to the idea of eating meat. However, if individuals who do not eat meat

share meals with those who do, they are more likely to be open to the practice of consuming meat.

Abhimanyu, [Mr Pande's son's friend] first ate meat, spicy chicken wings, at TGI Friday. He had accompanied his cousin Raju to the restaurant. While there Abhimanyu was tempted by the smell and the appearance of what Raju was eating and asked to have one. He liked the taste and now considers 'meat to be one of his favourite food items'. Abhimanyu's parents are vegetarian Brahmins and so is his uncle, Raju's father, the elder brother of Abhimanyu's father. But Raju's mother is a Goan Brahmin. This category of Brahmins commonly eats fish and also other meats. She and Abhimanyu's uncle met in the UK where they were first students and later worked, an example of exogamy—once unthinkable and now increasingly common.

When they set up a household it was decided, as a compromise, that meat would not be cooked at home but that Raju's mother would be free to eat it outside. When the children were born the same operating principle was applicable to them: 'We decided not to impose our preference on them. They can decide for themselves, when they grow up, whether they would like to continue eating meat or turn vegetarian.'

It was this social context—one in which consumption of meat was normalised by his cousin and accommodating uncle, a product of convergence of dietary preferences of individuals brought together by the practice of, until quite recently uncommon, exogamy—that was the immediate trigger for the initiation of Abhimanyu into the world of meat.¹⁰⁷

In a vegetarian household or kin group, the consumption of meat and alcohol can often foster a special bond between the members who consume meat and alcohol, a special kinship that is based on secretly consuming banned food items. This camaraderie is based on similar choices and lifestyles, whether real or perceived.

Ramesh was visiting India after a period of eight years. Appu, his cousin of about the same age, a pharmaceutical executive living in Dehradun [and friend of Manoj and Manish] invited Ramesh to an evening together. Both Ramesh and Appu come from a strictly vegetarian background where even eggs are not allowed inside the house and alcohol is taboo.

Appu suggested that he and Ramesh go for a drive in Appu's new 'SUV' (sports utility vehicle) and then eat outside and have 'some good time' together to celebrate a 'long overdue reunion'. Once inside the

¹⁰⁷ Here I am not arguing that the consumption of meat by Raju and Abhimanyu was inevitable because of exogamous marriages in their family. The individual personalities of parents are of course important, but close and sustained exposure to another culture is also likely to have an influence on those exposed to it.

car Appu asked Ramesh if he would like ‘a peg of Ballantine’ (Scotch whisky). He was carrying a bottle in his car, which he had purchased on ‘a recent visit to Singapore’.

After driving around for some time, drinking Ballantine and discussing the intricacies of Appu’s new SUV the two cousins reached a shopping mall in the main commercial area of Dehradun. A valet opened the driver’s door and Appu handed him the key to park the car. Once inside the mall, Appu and Ramesh headed for Barbeque Nation, a restaurant that served an unlimited amount of mainly, though not only, meat-based starters and main courses. Along the way Appu pointed out to Ramesh a nightclub where one could ‘get girls late at night’.

Once seated, the two cousins ordered vodka, not because vodka was the preferred drink but because they would have to get back home soon and vodka would smell less. While drinking alcohol is risky it is essential to a happy occasion such as this reunion. Functionally, ‘one cannot have meat without alcohol or alcohol without meat’.

Appu ordered various chicken dishes and minced mutton kebabs but sent back shrimp, fish and mutton preparations that contained larger pieces of meat. While Appu enjoys eating chicken he cannot eat fish because of its smell and does not like the stringy texture and strong taste of mutton.

Appu expressed his frustration at the ‘lack of company to enjoy good things in life’. For him ‘such visits to restaurants where I can drink alcohol and eat non-veg are rare because the right company is a problem’. The conversation drifted aimlessly from women in America to Appu’s recent overseas visits, all with his wife and young child, which constrained him and prevented him from making the most of the visits. But now that the two cousins had met again after a long gap, Appu would plan a visit to America and the two cousins would ‘live life to the hilt’.

In the example of kinship within kinship cited above, while meat and alcohol play an important role in bonding and sociality, there are several other implicit meanings at play. Because Ramesh has lived in America for a number of years, Appu assumes that he must consume alcohol and eat meat because ‘that is what people in foreign (western) countries do’. Since the west is synonymous with modernity, drinking alcohol and eating meat is a step in the direction of modernity for an aspirational individual like Appu. Appu thus took his chances and revealed his ‘digression from the norms of right practices’ by revealing to Ramesh that he ate meat and consumed alcohol. He may also have believed that, having lived in the west, Ramesh was less likely to judge Appu for his choices.

The evening’s interaction between Ramesh and Appu was about more than meat and alcohol. It was about the desire to display one’s achievements and new identity by taking

a foreign-returned cousin for a drive in an expensive car and hosting him in an upmarket restaurant where wealth, taste and new ways of being could be put on display. Ballantine whisky, discussion of recent foreign travels and plans to visit America, and lamentations for the 'right' company are symbolic of a desire to claim similarities with a successful cousin who lives overseas and with everything associated with life overseas: wealth, modernity and social emancipation. In this, Appu is assisted by his income and wealth, a culture that increasingly views eating out as normal, and the anonymity of urban life, where one can practice being 'different' without being noticed or judged by family and relatives.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

6.1 My Research Question

In this thesis, I examined the changing practices of meat consumption amongst a group of Hindus in north India. Specifically I asked, what are these practices, are they changing, and if so what underlies these changes? These simple questions are relevant because there is relatively little work on the everyday food practices of north Indian Hindus, especially in relation to meat consumption.

It is often said that India is changing at a fast rate. This is true. It is also true that change has left its imprint on all aspects of life from leisure to livelihood. The ways people live, dress, travel, commute, study, communicate and shop have all changed. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that food practices, including practices of meat consumption, have also changed. But *how* have the food practices, including those of meat avoidance and consumption, changed and how do these changes actually play out in everyday life?

Changes in people's social and economic lives become embedded in the people themselves and are in turn reflected in their everyday practices. As Warde (2005) says, 'it is in practice that consumption takes place'. I may add here that it is also in practice that avoidance of consumption takes place. Recognising the importance of everyday practice in understanding consumption of meat or its avoidance and the changes to these practices, my thesis relies on everyday practice to understand who consumes or avoids meat, and when, where and why they consume or avoid it. In doing so, this thesis questions the pervasive use of caste and class alone as frameworks to understand food practices and changes to them. It further questions the mutually exclusive binary of vegetarian–non-vegetarian through which north Indian Hindus describe themselves and are often described by others.

Much of the existing body of anthropological literature on Hindu food and related practices views these through the lens of caste and religion. More recently, increased meat consumption has been explained by the emergence of a large middle class, especially in the years following economic liberalisation in 1991. My thesis uses the existing body of literature to contextualise my research and build upon it by examining the lived everyday food practices among Hindus in a north Indian town. When we complicate the binaries of caste and socio-economic status—or indeed that of vegetarian and meat eater—by

adding more marginalised explanations, they point to a more complex engagement between the ‘new’ and the ‘old’ as Hindus in north India have sought to make sense of—and reflect—their rapidly changing worlds.

By focusing on everyday household food practices, and the richness that this analysis brings, this thesis demonstrates that meat consumption and avoidance is a tool through which Hindus in north India create and re-create their social identities. These identities are deeply contextual, overlapping and at times contradictory—as exemplified by the shifting and fluid definitions of vegetarian and meat eater.

Today there is no one clear and agreed-upon definition of vegetarian. A household can be vegetarian, even if its individual members are not. It is more acceptable for vegetarian households to serve meat to non-vegetarian guests, order in meat using home delivery or buy meat products for children when on an outing. This research shows that the definition of an individual as vegetarian or meat eater is also fluid and becoming increasingly so as individuals move between the vegetarian and meat eater categories depending on the day of the week, time of the year, and stage in their lives.

While such movement between categories may have always taken place, urban living and anonymity, non-kin based social networks, and reflexive consumption and individual choice have increased this movement and made it more visible. Complicating the binaries of caste, class and vegetarian–non-vegetarian by looking at the everyday practice of meat consumption and avoidance in a changing socio-economic and political context gives a better understanding of the place of meat in the everyday lives of north Indian Hindus.

6.2 Data Collection and Limitations

In attempting to understand the practices of meat consumption among north Indian Hindus and the recent changes in these practices I collected primary data from households in a middle-class neighbourhood in Dehradun in the state of Uttarakhand.

Early in my fieldwork I realised that the specific practices of meat consumption could not be understood without placing them in the larger context of practices of food consumption more generally. In other words, practices of meat consumption had to be viewed as part of an organic whole of food practices, rather than in isolation. As a result, I had to widen the scope of my research to document a much broader spectrum of food practices than I had originally planned, without diluting the focus on the practices of meat consumption.

These everyday practices are outlined in Chapter 3, with Chapters 4 and 5 focusing on the consumption and avoidance of meat.

The fieldwork to collect data for this thesis was carried out in a relatively cosmopolitan city atypical of north Indian cities of similar size. The city has above-average diversity, income levels and educational levels. While diversity of population is an advantage in capturing a range of food practices, the other two population characteristics—higher than average income levels and educational attainment—mean that any extrapolation of the data to draw broad conclusions about food practices among north Indian Hindus more generally, in particular practices of meat consumption, should be made bearing in mind the context in which this research was conducted.

The participants in the study came from a relatively homogeneous background. They were predominantly male high-caste Hindus with very high educational attainment, were salaried or retired and were 35 years of age or older. As a result, the data and findings of the study may be less applicable to lower-caste and working-class north Indian Hindus and women.

Finally, the observations on young Indians—a very large group and the one that is most likely to embody the socio-economic changes that India has undergone in the last two decades or more—are based on participant observations in public spaces. Exploring youth identity, especially with reference to consumption is a fascinating area of study. In the case of India where there is a large and growing young population this group assumes even greater importance as it will shape social, economic, and political choices and outcomes in the years and decades to come.

As the thesis notes Dehradun has long been famous for its schools. More recently it has emerged as a major hub for higher education. A number of private colleges and universities have sprung up to cater to a growing demand for higher education. This has led to an influx of young people into Dehradun. This in turn has changed not only the demographic profile of the city but its economy and public culture. This thesis touches on the nature of consumption and identity among youth in public spaces. In delineating the lives of Mr Mehta's sons it notes how stepping out of home and kinship ties changes the nature of sociality, which in turn is often a trigger for experimenting with new practices including those that may have been considered unacceptable by the norms of one's family and kin group. Mr Mehta's younger son started eating meat during four years of studying engineering and living in a hostel in another state of India. Similarly Manoj

would frequently visit shops around the main mosque in Srinagar along with friends from school – both boarders and day scholars – to sample beef (buffalo) kebabs and momos (Tibetan dumplings). Mr Mehta's older son evocatively described eating Kobe beef as a high point in his life because of what it epitomised - that he could afford to buy and consume an expensive meat product and nobody could tell him otherwise for either financial or social reasons. It signified material success and social emancipation at the same time.

These were fascinating leads, worthy of further and detailed exploration. However, given the time constraints and the focus on a bounded homogenous group I was constrained to keep the focus of my fieldwork small and narrow. There were only a few young participants in the study. While in this research I attempted to address this shortcoming to some extent with the help of participant observation of the younger residents of Dehradun, in public spaces inhabited by them, the findings of the study may not have captured the nuances of their social world.

6.3 Locating the Thesis in the Traditional Conceptualisation of Hindu Food Practices

Food occupies an important place in Brahminical Hindu cosmology. Food practices, despite their staggering diversity, are deeply embedded in the philosophy and worldview of the Hindu religion and are bound by it. However, religion is only one of several influences on food practices, which also include climate, season, resource endowment, and occupation. This goes some way to explain the immense regional diversity in the food practices of Hindus in India. Despite these myriad influences, religious beliefs, especially the framework of 'purity and pollution', has been the dominant lens informing understandings of Hindu food practices. In this explanation, meat, a symbolically important but ritually polluting item of food, is to be avoided. Consequently, vegetarianism, one of many contending sets of food practices in Hinduism, and the one widely practiced by Brahmins, has had its importance overemphasised to the point that it is widely believed that vegetarianism is the common Hindu food practice and that most Hindus are vegetarian. We know from various surveys that this is not the case.

As the recent studies and reports outlined in Chapter 1 have suggested, the consumption of animal products including meat is on the rise. While the details of this increase, such as disaggregation by class, caste and religion, have not been explored, the overwhelming

suggestion is that it is widespread. This increase in the demand for animal products, including meat, is attributed to an increase in the disposable income of many Indians over the last two decades. There is evidence from other societies to suggest that as a society becomes more prosperous its consumption of starchy, carbohydrate-dense foods goes down, while its consumption of protein-rich foods goes up.

It is certainly likely that people will eat ‘better’ with improved access to food, but a direct positive correlation between improved economic status and increased consumption of meat is not entirely supported by evidence, at least in the case of India. Some of the richest states in India, such as Punjab and Haryana in the north and Gujarat in the west, have the highest concentration of vegetarians as a percentage of the total population. Avoidance of meat in these areas has a long history and is embedded in cultural and religious mores. This is not to say that increased affluence does not alter food practices, including culturally embedded practices. However, to suggest a straightforward link between money and consumption not only misses the nuances of adoption or rejection of certain practices of food consumption but could also be simplistic and inaccurate.

The two dominant lenses used to examine the food practices of Hindus in India—of caste and, more recently, of ‘class’, the latter being a shorthand for economic status—no doubt tell us a great deal about the underpinnings of food practices among Hindus. After all food practices are embedded in caste and class. However, given the enormous variations, not only among different castes but also within the same castes and class groupings, these lenses alone fail to capture the nuances of everyday food practices. My research adopted the approach of carefully observing food consumption as a lived practice. In trying to better understand these practices and how they might have changed—or remained the same—my research looks at the *processes* that lie beneath these practices of food consumption, particularly as related to meat.

This approach led me to both frame the practices of meat consumption in the context of the larger socio-economic and cultural changes that have taken place in India, particularly in the state of Uttarakhand, and observe the role that these practices play in the creation and re-creation of embodied social identities. This approach examined how these changes have affected the lives of north Indian Hindus, and how people make sense of these changes and incorporate and assimilate them into their everyday practices.

6.4 Key Findings

At a foundational level, one of the key findings of my thesis is to demonstrate the limitations of resorting to the explanatory binaries of caste or class when explaining meat-related consumption patterns in India. While these approaches independently have a great deal of explanatory merit, they are limited in what they tell us about the changing practices of meat consumption among north Indian Hindus. Further, in their use as explanatory models, they approach the complex interactions between caste and class as though one must necessarily be privileged over the other - creating an artificial binary between two complex and interrelated social identities.¹⁰⁸ Practice theory provides a way to avoid this binary and a way to reconcile these two competing explanatory narratives. As geographies of space and practices contract allowing for multiple ways of being to coexist alongside, and as individuals come to have an ever expanding array of practices to choose from, at least theoretically, the act of adoption or rejection of practices is influenced not only by the embedded identity of the individual but also by the project of reflexive identity formation.

Food, which has long been used to shape, proclaim and maintain identities, continues to perform this function. However, increasingly, identities are not only inherited at birth or ascribed only by it. Modernity has brought with it new ways of creating and re-creating both embodied social identity and our physical forms. Recent decades have seen a proliferation of identities, some altogether new, others not so new but now publicly proclaimed. However, the acquisition of new identities does not mean that old identities cease to exist. Old identities continue to thrive and determine behaviour in certain social contexts. Individuals move seamlessly from one identity to another and to behaviour or conduct appropriate to that identity. An important question then is how are these new identities formed and what is the link between new identities, old identities and food practices?

¹⁰⁸ Caste and class have historically been closely aligned in India with the high caste Hindus forming the bulk of the middle and higher classes. While class has become more heterogeneous in terms of caste composition and while more lower caste Hindus have been able to join the ranks of the middle and upper classes, the strong positive correlation between caste and class have not disappeared. For examples of works that explore the relationship between caste and class see: Fuller, C.J. and Narasimhan, H. (2014) *Tamil Brahmins – the making of a middle class caste*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and Fuller, C. J. and Narasimhan, H. (2008) From landlords to software engineers: migration and urbanization among Tamil Brahmins. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 50 (1) 170-196.

As outlined in the Introductory Chapter, the conclusions arrived at in this thesis can be summarised as follows:

- North Indian Hindus create and re-create their social identities in everyday practice. As there are numerous identities, there are numerous food practices. These identities are deeply contextual, overlapping and at times contradictory. They change across groups and individuals, both spatially and temporally. However, for various historical and social reasons discussed earlier, Hindu food practices have been viewed through the lens of caste, gender and region, and more recently class.
- While caste and class are important in informing our understanding of food practices, especially those of meat consumption and avoidance, they tend to obscure the complexity of these practices.
- The detailed documentation and examination of everyday food practices in the context of the larger socio-economic changes taking place in India can help us better understand the nature of meat consumption and avoidance by north Indian Hindus.
- The story of meat consumption is not about increase or decrease, or greater acceptance or more forceful rejection; it is far more complex and nuanced than that. While people may consume more meat today or consume it more frequently—enabled by such changes as a greater social acceptance of meat and home delivery and fast food chains—vegetarianism is simultaneously promoted by yoga, *Ayurveda*, a concern for health and religious and political movements. Further, while there may have been a general increase in the social acceptance of meat, the tolerance for certain types of meat, in particular beef, has declined dramatically, as reflected in the intense violence being committed by right-wing Hindu groups against those suspected of trading in cows and/or beef or consuming it.
- The practices of meat consumption and avoidance reflect the constant calibration and recalibration of the ‘old’ and the ‘new’. While new practices and ways of life are being adopted and assimilated, old ways of being are not discarded wholesale. Thus, while meat may be more readily available and consumed today by many north Indian Hindus, the everyday food practice at home continues to remain primarily vegetarian.

Drawing on my fieldwork and using the theoretical framework of practice theory, this thesis has also several key findings about observed practices. These findings were unexpected and, subject to the limitations mentioned above, shed new light on social practices. They are also useful for informing future research. These findings are summarised below.

6.5 Observations of Current Practice

Based on my fieldwork, three observations of current practice are of particular interest:

- The everyday food practices of north Indian Hindus are vegetarian.
- North Indian Hindus, including those who eat meat, often still privilege vegetarianism as an ideal practice.
- Meat, especially meat served along with alcohol, while a marker of ‘festivity’, has not displaced traditional celebrations.

I found these observations particularly interesting because they challenged the simple notion that increased meat consumption is a logical consequence of increased income and a desire to be ‘western’ or ‘modern’. These observations demonstrate both the complexity of modern identities and the desire and ability among individuals and groups to create, preserve, and alter these identities. While these three observations are detailed in the main body of this thesis, I have briefly described them again below.

6.5.1 Everyday food practices of north Indian Hindus are vegetarian.

The everyday food practice in most north Indian Hindu households, irrespective of their self-identification as a vegetarian or meat-consuming household, remains vegetarian. In meat-eating households, meat is infrequently consumed and when it is consumed, meat is a small part of an otherwise vegetarian meal.

6.5.2 North Indian Hindus, including those who eat meat, often still privilege vegetarianism as an ideal practice.

There are other practices around meat consumption that suggest that even meat-eating Hindu households privilege vegetarianism. In such households, women, who are the so called custodians of the Hindu ritual world in the household, are often vegetarian. Many meat-eating north Indian Hindu households avoid cooking and consuming meat on certain days of the week and for extended periods throughout the year. Further, many Hindus

stop eating meat as they age and for religious reasons. Thus, while practices are changing, the symbolic normative value of vegetarianism has not been eroded, even though meat consumption is becoming more acceptable as a social practice.

6.5.3 Meat, especially meat served along with alcohol, while a marker of ‘festivity’, has not displaced traditional celebrations.

Meat, along with alcohol, has come to symbolise festivity and celebration. These celebrations are important to new forms of sociality even as new modes of economic engagement and urban living have weakened traditional kinship ties and fostered non-kinship based social relations. Often, these celebratory events are male-only events, organised outside the house and do not involve relatives. Meat and alcohol are central to these celebrations. Such celebrations are a part of regular socialising but also mark important events such as marriages, births and birthdays. Importantly, however, these new forms of celebration *complement rather than displace* traditional festivities. For example, cocktail parties, Christmas parties and New Year parties are ‘modern’ celebrations that occur outside or in addition to traditional festivities, which are generally observed with family members and centred on traditional food and non-alcoholic beverages.

6.6 Social Shifts Affecting Food Practices and Identity Expression

Some of the important socio-economic and cultural changes affecting food practice and identity expression as identified in this thesis started with the colonial economic arrangements and have become more pronounced over time. These include new modes of economic engagement, migration and mobility, reduced dependence on kinship ties, urban living, the nuclear family, an increased incidence of exogamous marriage, and increased participation of women in outside employment. Other changes are more recent, yet exert a strong influence over food practices. These include individualism, consumerism, globalisation, digitisation and the instant dissemination of information, mass media and social media, and the increased influence of the private sector and the state in shaping individuals’ choices through media campaigns and policy initiatives. It is in this larger context that my thesis attempts to make sense of everyday food practices, including the practices of meat consumption.

Among the myriad social changes, I highlight two key social changes that have particularly affected how food practices and associated identities are created, preserved and altered:

- The diminishing monopoly of the household as the site of food preparation and a shift to the public sphere.
- The increased role of multiple stakeholders and narratives—political, commercial and social—in influencing and policing food practices.

6.6.1 The diluted monopoly of the household as the site of food preparation and consumption and a shift to the public sphere.

Food preparation is no longer the monopoly of the household. It is true that everyday food is home-cooked food, but increasingly food has moved out of the private sphere and into public spaces. Roadside eateries, food stalls, restaurants, food courts in shopping malls, food on trains, food at airports—food is everywhere in public spaces. Increased mobility, lowering of restrictions on cooking and consuming food, new options to try and the enhanced ability to purchase are some of the factors that have enabled north Indian Hindus to navigate away from home-cooked traditional food with greater frequency.

The changes and continuity in food practices are a result of people's attempts to adapt to the changes in the context of everyday living. Old practices that have maintained their relevance have been retained, while new practices, better suited to the changed context have been adopted and other practices discarded. Because people's contexts vary, practices have altered at different rates and the variety of practices has increased. The process of change has been both gradual and incremental. Often new practices spread from an area or a group to which they might have relevance or not, meet with resistance from other groups, eventually acquire legitimacy and respectability, and then spread across a wider area and population. An example of this is the reduced reliance on processing food at home.

In urban areas, processing food at home is difficult because of a paucity of space and time. Therefore, the processing of food started to be contracted out. From here, this practice spread to small towns and rural areas, where it initially would have met with resistance before eventually acquiring legitimacy. Similarly, eating out, a practice born out of necessity—as the early migrants to colonial town and cities, overwhelmingly men,

and unable to cook, started eating in community eateries—soon acquired a leisure aspect for affluent Indians who started to eat out for recreation.

6.6.2 The increased role of multiple stakeholders and narratives—political, commercial and social—in influencing and policing food practices.

As the relative importance of family and households in determining food practices is declining, we can see the emergence of new stakeholders and narratives—political, commercial and social. These narratives emerge in response to national agendas (as in the case of the state promoting nutrition), changing material circumstances (as in the case of packaged food) and/or actively compete to claim the moral authority that was previously attributed to the household (in the case of right-wing Hindu movements).

Multiple stakeholders, such as schools, pressure groups, the state, businesses, and health experts, have both a vested interest in shaping food practices and the ability to do so. Easy access to multiple sources of information and mass media has given these stakeholders an effective platform to reach individuals and groups and shape their food practices.

6.6.2.1 The role of the state

The state has become increasingly important in shaping food practices. It can do so through promoting some things and banning others. The state can also promote the consumption of certain food items by subsidising them while discouraging others by taxing them. Increased taxation on tobacco products has been used as a policy tool to discourage people from smoking and to fund medical care of smokers. Certain alcohol products are taxed more heavily than others and, more recently, an increased tax on sugary beverages has been implemented in some countries with the aim to reduce their consumption.

The state can also influence tastes and preferences through public service campaigns to promote healthy eating and a healthy lifestyle; examples of these have been cited in the main chapters of the thesis. However, the state can also unintentionally change the food practices of many people through large developmental programs not necessarily directly aimed at changing food practices. Here one could talk of the midday meal programs, but also of more indirect but much more influential projects such as infrastructure projects, which open new markets and create new demand; irrigation projects, which change cropping patterns and have a bearing on food availability; agricultural research and extension through government agricultural universities and other related agencies, which

introduce new crops or improved varieties of existing crops, thereby changing the food practices of large numbers of people in the long term. In this thesis, I have discussed how the green revolution in India, launched in the 1960s, and the state-sponsored PDS, shifted the eating habits of many people from millets and other coarse grains to wheat and rice.

The state has a stake in food production and distribution and food practices for various reasons—food security and national defence are of course important, but there are also other considerations, including employment generation, resource planning and optimal use of resources, encouraging certain industries and exports, and economic growth. With the emergence of obesity and related lifestyle diseases such as diabetes and cardiac diseases, which threaten the gains made in health indicators, and the increased cost they are beginning to impose through reduced productivity and increased cost of healthcare, the state has become more involved in monitoring and regulating people's food habits. These policy initiatives include multi-pronged strategies such as public awareness campaigns on healthy eating and living, discriminatory taxation, and removing junk food and sugary drinks from schools. One can safely predict that the role of the state in shaping and managing food practices is unlikely to diminish any time soon.

6.6.2.2 *Commercial practices*

Corporations and businesses have played an important role in popularising processed food. The distribution chains of large business conglomerates have increased their outreach to the most remote parts of the country. This follows substantial improvements in physical infrastructure such as roads and rail networks as well as in technology related to product design, manufacturing and packaging. Together these advancements have enabled businesses to produce better products with a longer shelf life at lower prices and, coupled with the spread of mass media, given them the ability to get these through distribution channels to consumers in all parts of the country. In addition, refrigeration and cold chains have significantly expanded the market for perishable items.

Large corporations, such as Reliance, Tata and ITC to name a few, have invested heavily in backward- and forward-integrated agribusinesses. They now own vast tracts of land; factories that produce inputs for the agricultural sector, including seeds, fertilisers and other chemicals; farm machinery; food processing plants; and retail outlets. Where they do not produce food themselves, they have a controlling influence through contract farming. Businesses today have enormous power to shape, among other things, the production and consumption of food. There is also the ubiquitous advertising, informing

people about new products, their benefits, how to consume them, and ‘new’ identities, which are demonstrated by this consumption. In the context of processed food, not only are these new products catering to the needs of ‘the urban dwelling working woman’ in a practical sense, they also symbolise the norms of the new modernity.

6.6.2.3 Social narratives—*Health, moral authority and subversion*

There is a growing body of dieticians, doctors, and specialist nutritionists who exercise enormous influence over the food practices of individuals. New research is being published daily in which the same food product or eating practice is variously praised and discredited—and this is just the information coming from ‘experts’. One of the features of the mass and social media world is that everyone who has access to it also potentially has a voice and a platform - such as YouTube - to express their opinions.

There is growing anxiety about what one is eating and one’s food practices. The modern lifestyle and its excesses have taken a toll on people’s health. Many health agencies have commented on the alarming state of the health of a large percentage of India’s population. It is feared that India is heading towards an explosion of diabetes, hypertension and related complications among the population. As people become aware of this health crisis, a frantic search for solutions via, among other things, ‘healthier food practices’, has ensued at the level of the individual.

The desire for healthy food practices particularly influences narratives around meat consumption, as the post- rather than pre-swallowing world, which focuses on the nutritional rather than symbolic meaning of consumption, is privileged in this health narrative. This narrative provides an interesting overlay for north Indian Hindus for many of whom meat consumption is largely symbolic – rather than nutritional - and is instrumental in the creation of identity, whether as a marker of modernity, masculinity or caste identity.

With a focus on religious identity, political movements are seeking to claim the moral and religious space of what it means to be a Hindu. In India, the current BJP government has tightened restrictions on the sale, purchase and consumption of beef, and right wing Hindu nationalist groups increasingly patrol the trade in cows and beef and the consumption of beef as a strategy to strengthen a homogeneous, pan-Hindu identity and distinguish Hindus from non-Hindus, especially Muslims. In contrast, beef—possibly *because* of its symbolic value—is consumed by the educated middle class to proclaim a

secular cosmopolitan identity. In addition, beef-eating festivals are organised by low caste Hindus to proclaim their *dalit*¹⁰⁹ identity and reclaim their cultural practices.

6.7 Future Research

This thesis builds on the existing body of literature by using it to set the context of my work. It adds to this existing literature by building upon the structures of ‘caste’ and ‘increased wealth’ to explain the avoidance or eating of meat. While caste and class remain important in shaping preferences, they alone do not capture the nuances of the practices of meat consumption among Hindus in north India. By focusing on everyday household food practices, and the richness that this analysis brings, this thesis demonstrates that meat consumption and avoidance are means of creating and recreating social identities. In doing so this thesis adds additional layers of complexity to caste and class identities and practices.

As has been well established through this thesis, these identities are transient and deeply contextual; they reinforce one another at times and at other times are contradictory. This is best exemplified by the shifting and fluid definitions of ‘vegetarian’ and ‘meat eater’. When we complicate the binaries of caste and socio-economic status to examine more marginalised explanations of meat consumption and avoidance, what emerges is a complex picture of a group adapting to a rapidly changing world. Through this thesis, I have shown that the apparently ‘mutually exclusive’ explanations for meat consumption preferences—namely, caste and income—can be reconciled and enriched by observing everyday practices and their role in identity formation and re-creation.

While there are many possible areas for future research, including further studies in less cosmopolitan cities, or among different Hindu groups, three key areas of future research are identified here: the role of stakeholders in shaping food practices; how social media and mass media disseminate images and other content to influence existing food practices and shape new ones, especially among the young; and finally the new relationship between food, image of self, and identity formation.

When I conducted my fieldwork, there was already a growing awareness of the importance of physical exercise and fitness, but on a recent visit to Dehradun I noticed a proliferation of gyms, sports shops selling nutritional supplements, and people using

¹⁰⁹ A term used to describe low caste Hindus historically referred to as untouchables.

them. Have these developments had any effect on food practices, in particular increased consumption of protein and a reduction in carbohydrates? If so, what are the implications for practices of consuming animal products, in particular meat? While this thesis briefly touched on the idea of the pre- and post-swallowing worlds, given the relatively unique relevance of meat to both Hindu identity and the ‘modern high protein body’—this could be a particularly relevant and interesting area of future research.

In addition, future research could further explore what Hawkins (2013) describes as the active role played by new consumer products such as packaging in not only providing a medium through which to consume another product, but also in shaping and creating altogether new practices of consumption. From this perspective, something viewed historically as inert or passive and a response to market demands acquires its own agency and, in turn, shapes both the market and the nature of demand itself. This too is a particularly relevant area of research in India, where the consumer culture is mediating social interactions at a rapid pace compared with the historic pace of change.

Moving beyond the two dominant explanans of meat consumption or avoidance - caste and class - and breaking the vegetarian–meat eater binary opens new avenues of potential research. It is also hoped this will enable researchers who may be unfamiliar with the complexity and nuances of Hindu food practices to explore the practices of the community, without being analytically paralysed by the normative and all-encompassing narrative of Brahminical Hinduism—a model that is very attractive in its reductionist simplicity.

In summary, the food practices of a people encapsulate the socio-economic and cultural context of their society. In that sense, food practices are instructive in making sense of the society and understanding it. It is important in this context to understand that while multiple factors shape the food practices of individuals, the most important ones are invariably mundane and concern everyday living.

The broad framework of everyday food practices among Hindus in north India continues to be underpinned by the Hindu religion and cultural practices. While increased disposable income and an increasing variety of food options certainly influence food choices, when observing the lived practice, it is evidence that practices still follow long-established patterns, at least for now. Vegetarianism and home-cooked food governed by traditional recipes and practices still hold sway. Within this broad but loose framework, there is today more scope for experimentation, diversity and choice than ever before. This

is because parts of north Indian Hindu society are more open to and offer greater scope for diverse expressions of choice and identity and because social, economic and cultural contexts of members are more varied than perhaps ever before. If meat consumption is increasing, then so is vegetarianism. If more people are queuing up for western fast food, then Haldirams is doing more business than multiple western fast food chains combined. If the young are adopting protein-rich diets, then older people are shifting to *satvik* food high in fruit and vegetables. As a result the emerging scenario of the practices of food consumption is complex and hard to categorise. However, what is certain is that new practices are being added to a core of existing practices, while many old practices are being modified or discarded. This trend will most likely continue.

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