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**ST. JOSEPH’S COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS), BANGALORE**

**END SEMESTER EXAMINATION — OCTOBER 2021**

**GENERAL ENGLISH — III SEM BBA/BCom**

**GE 318 - Leisure, Identity and Writing: Food (Special Course) BBA/BCom**

**Time: 2 1/2 hours Max marks: 70**

**This paper contains FOUR printed sides.**

**INSTRUCTIONS:**

**1. This paper is only for BBA/BCom students who have picked the General English Special Course.**

**2. Clearly mention “BBA/BCom SPECIAL COURSE” at the top of your Answer Sheet**

**2. Adhere to the prescribed word limits.**

**3. You are allowed to use a dictionary.**

**I.Read the following excerpt from the piece titled *The Science, Folklore and the Joy of Eating with One’s Hands* by Elizabeth Yorke.**

Sitting at the table it’s the smell that arrives first. Steaming hot rice with a dollop of ghee, melting its way down to the core. The dal is a little over seasoned today, the extra jeera (cumin) tingles your nose. The plate is set down in front of you and you see the deliciousness—the bright yellow of the dal against the pillowy white rice, with pale ghee shimmering through in parts—looks exactly how you anticipated it from the smell. But before the taste—touch. You are much too eager and stick your fingers right in the center. HOT! Remembering your childhood, you say a prayer of thanks and start slowly mixing the rice from the outermost parts of the heap to avoid the heat of the center. The rice is as soft as your eyes said it would be and the dal is just right—not chalky or slimy. The temperature is perfect. Your fingers say you need a little more dal, and you listen to them, scooping some from the side and mixing the rice and lentils some more. Now, this feels right. You bring the morsel of rice and lentils up to your mouth and place it there for the tongue to receive. As you chew slowly, there is deep gratification—for the food tastes just as good as the fingers predicted. You have been transported back to that safe space where your mother fed you as a child.

Some months ago, my friend Anusha and I got told off for eating dal-chawal (lentils and rice) with our hands at our Italian university by an elderly lady from the cleaning service. Anusha went on to tell her in broken Italian that our hands were probably cleaner than some of the utensils there. She laughed, in disbelief and shaking her head said, “Solo frutta e pane!” (Only fruit and bread!) Eating rice with our bare fingers was unacceptable!

Her disapproval didn’t deter us. Eating familiar food in a foreign land wasn’t enough. For us to be the most satisfied with our meal, even if Anusha burnt the sambhar or I over seasoned the poriyal, eating with our “bare” hands, wiping the last bit of yogurt from the plate, made every one of our meals complete.

Throughout history, people across the world have enjoyed food fed directly into their mouths with hands. In Rome 12 AD, people reclined on cushioned couches drinking plenty of wine (of course) while plucking at food with their fingers. Knives made of bronze or wood with iron blades were used to cut meat and spoons carved from bone, bronze or wood were used to drink soup. But there were no forks and the Romans ate with their hands.

We continue to have that tactile interaction with food in different degrees before it is presented to our mouths. The most minimal interaction is usually with food that’s not messy and easy to eat like the occasional pizza slice, fruit, sandwich or street snack. Here, the structure of the form of the food is the deciding factor in whether we use our hands or not.

Irrespective of ease of eating, culture plays the dominant role. In some cultures, we are taught not to eat with our hands at all. In others, food acts like an edible medium in the form of tortillas or mielie pap, and these traditions come with some interesting logic and long tales of folklore behind them.

Today, eating with the hand seems to be growing more uncommon. It took nearly a thousand years to find a non-reactive metal that didn’t make food taste bad, and then some colonization, or the fear of it, spread the culture of cutlery around the world.

**On creating a strategic sensory image**

We eat with our eyes first. But for those of us who eat with our hands, we are conscious of mixing textures and temperatures. Tactile interaction with food gives a new dimension to the sensory input of smell, sight and taste. Touching food could be a fresh set of “eyes” before we taste and after we see and smell. Our fingers, like our lips, contain masses of nerve endings, and this would cumulatively contribute to the anticipation of food. The hands become the strategists that plan and execute the best temperature, texture and quantity that the mouth will receive.

Papa taught me to make tasty luqmas (a morsel). Take a bit of rice and then wet it with dal or the gravy of the meat, add a bit of vegetable and then mix it all well so each mouthful is artfully blended to produce a burst of flavour in the mouth. – Nandita Haskar, author.

Neuroscientist Kruthika explains, “Watching a movie at home would be equivalent to eating with a spoon, and watching it in a theatre would be equivalent of eating with hands. A multi-sensory input, contributing to a single experience, would do a better job of engaging the brain.”

**On body, mind, and gut: engaging the senses and the elements**

I was observing my mother at dinner the other night. She detests using cutlery and only eats with her hands and, like every Indian mother, is a serial multitasker. Her phone pinged. WhatsApp probably. I was quite shocked when she ignored the notification. Coming from a woman who is constantly logged into some social media platform, this was unbelievable. She did hear it. But answering the phone and checking texts just wasn’t practical—her fingers were covered in food and she had no choice but to focus on the meal and talk to us.

When we sit down to eat a meal with our hands, it creates a situation (if we allow it) in which we are nudged to give full attention to the food we are eating, limiting mind-wandering activity and bringing awareness to the present moment, to the food and the people we are with.

As a cook, it is always stressed upon to touch, smell and engage with the ingredient. Touch is an important part of gauging if the fish is fresh or the fruits are ripe. This process creates a deeper connection with what we are about to cook. In many cultures, the hand is used as a tool of measure. The hand judges the exact amount of seasoning to make a dish perfect, not just for flavor but, as Ayurveda teaches, for subconsciously adding ingredients in the proportion that the body needs.

My mom once explained to my teenage self that the secret was biochemical: the subtle oils of her fingers imparted some sort of alchemy to the little sphere—a pheromonal cocktail, I suppose—that would only fully blossom in the mouth of her offspring. Others would just call it maternal love. – Arun Venugopal, WNYC reporter.

Feeding children with the hand is common across hand-eating cultures. A mother is able to mash the food so it’s the right texture and not too hot for the child. Arun Venugopal’s mother was probably not wrong, she was feeding him her maternal love of experiences and moments curated in her own unique microbial hand flavour.

**Finger-Lickin’—Good?**

I have lived in Europe for 40 years. Every chance I have I use my fingers. I find incredible comfort eating with my fingers. It brings back memories. – Dr. Christiani Jeyakumar Henry, nutrition scientist.

One of the reasons children are said to suck their thumbs is to stimulate an emotionally safe space. The motion of the mouth on the thumb is said to make them feel they are in a comfortable environment. This might be relatable to licking fingers after a meal.

As the brain assembles smell and taste into flavors and memories, it still remains an internal and personal experience. But when it comes to touch, the interaction of the hands sharing food becomes a form of communication. From an internal experience to a display of emotions and culture—satisfaction, disgust, comfort.

So what could this mean? Is it right or wrong? Eating with hands moves beyond form or cultural context. It is heavily influenced by the situation and personal beliefs.

The hands create our first physical connection to food. They are a tactile mediator that helps deliver taste expectations and a microbial descriptive journal of who we are as people. Eating, tasting, licking, teaching, digesting—the fingers work together in shaping a maximum experience, one that signifies intimacy with both food and family.

**I.A. Answer the following in 5-8 sentences each: (5x5=25)**

1. Pick your favourite detail from the passage above. Give reasons for your choice.

2. The author describes rice and dal as - *Steaming hot rice with a dollop of ghee, melting its way down to the core*. Attempt a similar description of your favourite food on a plate.

3. What according to you would be an embarrassing way to eat a meal? Why?

4. Why do you think it is ‘maternal love’ that is always connected to food and cooking? Is the popularisation of this ‘maternal love’ justified?

5. *‘…her fingers were covered in food and she had no choice but to focus on the meal and talk to us.’* Do you think this is true in most cases?

**I.B. Answer ANY TWO of the following in 200 words each: (2X15=30)**

6. What according to you is the messiest food to eat with your hands? Attempt a detailed description of the struggles of eating this food.

7. Which of the reasons the author gives in the passage to explain the joy of eating with hands do you find yourself aligning with? Why?

8. What kind of memories come back to you when you think about eating with hands? Add an anecdote or two from your experiences.

**II.A Answer the question below in about 200 words: (1x15=15)**

9. The author seems to suggest that eating with hands is something that works universally moving beyond form or context. But scholars point out that, the author ignores the fact that local practices often dictate those choices. Sticky rice for instance would not be such a handsome pleasure and this an aesthetic pleasure to be obtained from being able to pick a portion that is bite size or fork sized rather than hand sized. Which side would you pick the author’s or the scholars? Why?