Food as Cultural Memory: Caste and Gastropolitics in Shahu Patole's *Dalit Kitchens of Marathwada*

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This is to certify that the dissertation entitled **Food as Cultural Memory: Caste and Gastropolitics in Shahu Patole's *Dalit Kitchens of Marathwada*** is a record of the studies carried out by **SRUTHI S.**, at the department of English, T.K.M. College of Arts and Science, Kollam, under the guidance of **Aaysha Humayoon Kabeer** and submitted to the University of Kerala in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Masters of Arts in English Language and Literature.

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I hereby declare that the dissertation entitled **Food as Cultural Memory: Caste and Gastropolitics in Shahu Patole's *Dalit Kitchens of Marathwada*** submitted to the University of Kerala in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of the degree of Masters of Arts in English Language and Literature is the original record of studies and research carried out by me during 2024–2026 under the guidance of Aaysha Humayoon Kabeer, Guest Lecturer, Department of English, T.K.M. College of Arts and Science, Kollam and it has not formed the basis for the award of any degree, title or recognition.



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Preface

This dissertation examines how food mediates caste, and resistance in Shahu Patole's *Dalit Kitchens of Marathwada* through the lenses of Subaltern Studies and critical food studies, informed by cultural memory theory. The study examines how food narratives extend beyond culinary practices to function as repositories of lived experiences, collective memory, and cultural identity. By foregrounding the everyday lives of the Mahar and Mang communities, it demonstrates how food becomes a medium for preserving history, shaping identity, and resisting caste-based oppression.

The dissertation is organized into four chapters. The first chapter, "Introduction," presents the scope, objectives, research questions, methodology, and significance of the study. It introduces the concept of food narratives, discusses the socio-cultural significance of food within the caste system, and provides an overview of *Dalit Kitchens of Marathwada* as the primary text selected for analysis.

The second chapter, "Theorizing Caste, Memory, and the Politics of Food," outlines the interdisciplinary theoretical framework that underpins the study. It examines the evolution of Subaltern Studies and its relevance to Dalit literature, alongside cultural memory theory and critical food studies. The chapter further discusses key analytical concepts, including gastro-politics, purity and pollution, and gastronativism, to illuminate the complex intersections of food, caste, memory, identity, and power.

The third chapter "Food, Memory, and Resistance: A Gastropolitical Reading of *Dalit Kitchens of Marathwada*" analyses the work by examining food narratives as

expressions of cultural memory and forms of resistance. It explores how recipes, kitchens, oral traditions, and everyday culinary practices preserve the collective experiences of Dalit communities while functioning as living archives of labour, deprivation, survival, and community life. The chapter further examines how Patole challenges dominant notions of purity and pollution, exposes the politics of food practices, and reclaims Dalit culinary traditions as symbols of resilience, dignity, and cultural affirmation. It also investigates the intersections of caste, gender, labour, and identity as reflected in Dalit food culture.

The fourth chapter, "Conclusion" synthesizes the major findings and highlights its contribution to the fields of Dalit literature, critical food studies, and Subaltern Studies. It argues that *Dalit Kitchens of Marathwada* transforms everyday food practices into powerful narratives of cultural memory and resistance, demonstrating that food serves not only as sustenance but also as a means of preserving identity, challenging social hierarchies, and reclaiming marginalized histories.

By combining literary analysis with interdisciplinary theoretical perspectives, this dissertation contributes to the growing scholarship on Dalit food narratives and cultural memory. It emphasizes the significance of everyday culinary practices as sites of historical remembrance, social critique, and resistance while reaffirming literature's role in recovering voices that have long remained absent from dominant historical and cultural narratives.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Food is any substance consumed by living organisms for nutritional support, providing essential energy and nutrients for growth, repair, bodily functions, and the maintenance of life. Food is fundamental for survival and is one of the basic needs of humans. However, food is more than just a means of survival; it shapes cultural identity. Food today goes beyond nutrition. Sociologically, it "is inseparable from powerful material and symbolic realities" (Abarca and Colby 2) which becomes rhetorically embodied (Johnson). It shapes and nourishes histories, identities, politics, culture, and social order. Food narratives help us understand these dimensions at a deeper level. From each household, traditions, recipes, and secrets are passed down through oral traditions, travelling into the mainstream of literature. Each dish carries memories of warmth, the past, and togetherness.

Food narratives refer to the ways food is described, shared, and interpreted in cultural texts to reflect social values, power relations, and historical experiences. They "are embodied and embedded in social networks, socio-cultural contexts and socio-economic epochs" (Nettleton and Uprichard 99). They transmit stories of shared experience and reveal how food habits influence/are influenced social hierarchies. They also shape our dietary decisions, health trends, and personal choices. In the context of sustainability, food narratives gain greater importance. As we confront environmental issues and seek a more conscientious lifestyle, the food stories we share can strengthen and advance these efforts. Narratives that highlight local, seasonal, and minimally processed foods can encourage sustainable practice.

Food narratives gain importance in a variety of social, cultural, historical, and political contexts. They preserve collective memory, document everyday life, and reveal how food is closely connected to identity, religion, gender, class, and power. They also help us understand migration, globalization, and changing food habits across generations. In the context of sustainability, food narratives encourage awareness of local, seasonal, and traditional food practices that promote environmentally conscious living. At the same time, they expose inequalities in access to food and resources, demonstrating that food is never merely about nutrition but also about culture, history, and social relations. Food in India extends beyond the realm of sustenance and nourishment, functioning as a significant marker of social identity, cultural belonging and hierarchical relations. Dietary practices have historically been shaped by caste structures, determining not only what individuals consume but also the social meanings attached to their food choices. Within the Indian caste system, food has often operated as a mechanism for maintaining notions of purity and pollution, thereby reinforcing social divisions and inequalities.

Dominant food narratives have largely been constructed from upper-caste perspectives, privileging vegetarianism and presenting it as representative of Indian culture as a whole. Consequently, the culinary traditions and food practices of marginalized communities, particularly Dalits, have remained neglected, stigmatized and excluded from mainstream discourse; and these practices of "lower caste and communities outside the caste system are labelled as dirty" (Kikon 286). Dalit food narratives form a literary category that explores how culinary traditions and cultural eating habits influence caste identity, social inequalities, gender roles, and acts of resistance. Shahu Patole's *Dalit Kitchens of Marathwada* is a seminal text of

contemporary Dalit food narratives that challenges these dominant representations by foregrounding the experiences, memories and culinary traditions of Dalit communities, especially the Mahar and Mang communities of Marathwada. Shahu Patole is a contemporary Marathi writer and retired government officer from Maharashtra. He is known for documenting the food history and culinary traditions of Dalit communities in Maharashtra. His work focuses on the relationship between food, caste, culture, and identity.

In *Dalit Kitchens in Marathwada*, translated by Bhushan Korganonkar, Shahu Patole skilfully combines personal stories, culinary experiences, and socio-political insights to craft a narrative firmly grounded in themes of caste oppression and cultural resilience, occupying a crucial space in contemporary Dalit food narratives. In this work, food is not depicted merely as sustenance but as a lens to explore caste, exclusion, hierarchy, and resistance. Patole's book captures the duality of food as both oppression and empowerment. On the one hand, Brahminism has historically enforced rigid dietary codes that dictate what Dalits can eat, where they can eat, and even how they should prepare food – all mechanisms that underscore how 'food habits and caste cannot be separated in Indian culture' (Patole xiii). The book, originally titled *Anna He Apoorna Brahma*, consists of twelve chapters that introduce the reader to these communities, their internal divisions, oppression, and a variety of vegetarian and non-vegetarian recipes. It also examines the impact of the 1972 famine on the rural food culture of Marathwada.

Marathwada is a region located in the Indian state of Maharashtra. Patole discusses the organized varna–jati system in Marathwada, which dictates various aspects of life such as residence, occupation, diet, sharing practices, and identity based

on caste hierarchy. In India, social classification is traditionally split into four varnas, with communities historically deemed "untouchable" existing outside of this structure. These marginalized groups have historically faced discrimination and were excluded from significant religious and social occasions. Moreover, even within Dalit communities, there is an internal caste hierarchy that classifies some groups as "untouchable" in relation to others, with specific communities like the Chambhar, Dhor, Mahar, and Mang ranked from higher to lower status. The Mangs are viewed as the most marginalized and vulnerable group. Patole illustrates how their social standing was shaped by their occupations and the dominance of Brahmanical norms. They were regarded as outsiders, often barred from using public wells; if they came into contact with the water, it was deemed unclean. Ironically, upper-caste individuals depended on their labour to maintain these wells; but after performing religious rites, the water was regarded as holy (Patole 49-51).

The Mahar and Mang communities represent the marginalized sections of society whose histories, cultures and everyday experiences have largely remained absent from mainstream narratives. Shahu Patole explains that these communities were placed at the lowest strata of the caste hierarchy and were compelled to live outside the boundaries of the village because they were considered untouchable and ritually impure. Their lives were closely associated with hereditary occupations assigned by the varna system, such as sanitation work, village security, rope-making, leather-related labour, the disposal of dead animals and other forms of manual service. Although these communities played a crucial role in sustaining the village economy and social structure, they continued to remain socially excluded and deprived of dignity and recognition. Patole points out that while the dominant castes occupied the central spaces

of the village, the Mahars and Mangs were pushed to its outskirts, reflecting the spatial dimensions of caste-based discrimination and exclusion.

Patole further illustrates that the lives of the Mahar and Mang communities were marked by poverty, social stigma and cultural marginalization. Their food habits, which included the consumption of beef, buffalo meat and other socially prohibited foods, were often viewed with disgust by dominant caste communities and became another means through which caste oppression was reinforced. The author argues that these food practices did not arise merely out of personal preference, but were shaped by historical circumstances, occupational duties and limited access to resources. Since the Mahars and Mangs were entrusted with the responsibility of disposing of dead cattle, they often consumed portions of these animals as a means of survival. Patole questions why these communities alone were burdened with such practices and suggests that the caste system compelled them to sustain themselves within structures of deprivation.

Although both communities shared similar experiences of marginalization, Patole also points out certain distinctions within their food cultures and social practices. The Mahar community traditionally regarded pork consumption as undesirable, whereas members of the Mang community consumed pork but considered horse meat taboo. Internal hierarchies and practices of untouchability also existed among Dalit communities, revealing the complexities embedded within caste relations themselves. Nevertheless, Patole emphasizes that the histories, culinary traditions and lived experiences of the Mahar and Mang communities constitute an important repository of Dalit memory and cultural identity. By documenting their food practices, customs and everyday realities, *Dalit Kitchens of Marathwada* challenges dominant representations of Indian cuisine and brings to light the neglected histories of communities whose

cultural contributions have long been silenced. Through this act of documentation, Patole reclaims Dalit food traditions as powerful expressions of memory, identity and resistance.

They seldom learned about the ingredients in these recipes and could only experience the flavours during festivals, often having to guess the contents. They were relegated to receiving spoiled or soured buttermilk, often served outside the home. Women, in particular, experienced dual oppression, both as lower-caste individuals and as females. In the novel, they are portrayed as the creators of culinary traditions, crafting meals with the limited ingredients at their disposal. Each dish, therefore, is important by itself, and has a story of its own. Thus, each recipe that Patole documents, contain a list of ingredients labelled under "If available (optional)" and the method includes lines such as "the other ingredients(1-8) are optional and added later; the taste is different in each of these ways" (Patole 155), "you can skip whatever is not available out of this list, except salt and chillies" (Patole 156), "add... and any other optional available ingredients" (Patole 162), etc. and multiple recipes, numbered as "Recipe 1", "Recipe 2", "Recipe 3", etc. for the same dish. Lacking access to the higher-quality ingredients available to the upper castes, and inconsistent availability of ingredients, they faced restrictions on the development of their culinary practices, which were controlled by those in power. They did not eat what they wanted but only what was provided to them. Even in this basic necessity, they were bound by the approval of the upper castes.

Dalit Kitchens of Marathwada primarily concentrates on the food culture, lived experiences and social histories of the Mahar and Mang communities of Maharashtra. It draws attention to the Alutedari and Balutedari systems, as well as the subgroups and fragmentation within Dalit communities. It also explores the psychological impacts of

the caste system and gendered roles. Through a detailed exploration of their culinary traditions, dietary practices and everyday struggles, Patole attempts to recover a significant aspect of Dalit life that has long remained absent from mainstream cultural and literary discourse. The book highlights how food habits are deeply intertwined with caste, occupation and social hierarchy, revealing the ways in which the lives of marginalized communities have been shaped by systems of exclusion and discrimination. By documenting recipes, food customs and cultural practices, Patole preserves an important archive of Dalit memory and identity.

The book further examines the relationship between food and caste politics by demonstrating how dietary practices function as markers of social status and instruments of exclusion. Patole argues that food culture in India is closely aligned with caste and class divisions, where notions of purity and pollution determine social acceptance and belonging. He particularly focuses on the historical conditions that compelled the Mahar and Mang communities to consume foods that were stigmatized by dominant caste groups. Through this discussion, the book questions the hegemonic narratives that privilege upper-caste food cultures while silencing the culinary traditions of marginalized communities. In doing so, it exposes the inequalities embedded within India's social and cultural structures.

Another major concern of the book is the preservation of collective memory and the assertion of Dalit identity through food narratives. Patole presents food not merely as a means of sustenance but as a repository of history, experience and resistance. The text records the hardships, poverty, cultural discrimination and social stigma faced by the Mahar and Mang communities while simultaneously celebrating their resilience and survival. By bringing these neglected food histories into public discourse, *Dalit*

Kitchens of Marathwada challenges dominant representations of Indian cuisine and reclaims Dalit culinary traditions as expressions of memory, identity and resistance against caste-based oppression.

Patole actively preserves local food recipes and passes them on to future generations. The work acts as both a testament and a form of preservation that functions as resistance as well as resilience. It is not a typical cookbook but an archive of cultural memory, exposing caste-based exclusion in Indian culinary history. The recipes in the work demonstrate how these food practices were shaped by control, social order, scarcity, and acts of resistance.

In a caste-based society, food, along with many other things, is often used as a tool to enforce concepts of pollution, purity, and social exclusion. Subaltern food narratives thus become a form of resistance, where reclaiming stigmatized foods acts as a means of self-definition. Through these narratives, marginalized communities oppose dominant culinary norms, challenge caste-based prejudice, and assert their presence in the everyday politics of survival, work, and social relations. Food practices carry social messages about identity, relationships, and the negotiation of power through everyday acts such as eating and commensality (Appadurai, 1981). In this context, literature becomes a powerful tool to resist upper-caste dominance. According to the contemporary literary scholars like Kiran Das, Saswat Samay Das, and Dibyendu Sahana, Patole's book captures the duality of food as both oppression and empowerment, in their work "Tasting caste: Dalit foodways, gendered labor, and resistance in *Dalit Kitchens of Marathwada*".

The research methodology of this dissertation employs a qualitative, interdisciplinary approach rooted in subaltern studies. It involves a detailed thematic and discourse analysis to unravel the socio-political tensions between the Dalit and the upper caste kitchens, as well as their representations in the public sphere. The primary source for this research is Shahu Patole's *Dalit Kitchens of Marathwada*, which is examined through the theoretical frameworks of Subaltern Studies, particularly focusing on gastro-politics, intersectionality, and affect theory.

This text is selected for its relevance in representing collective Dalit experiences of food culture, memory, and resistance. As the work also includes the author's personal experiences, it offers deeper insight into the voices and lived realities of marginalized communities. A gastropolitical analysis enables the examination of intertwined social power structures. It highlights oppression in multiple forms such as religious, occupational, economic, cultural, and gendered.

The central argument of this project is that the food narratives of Dalits in Marathwada serve as both preservers of cultural memory and acts of resistance against caste-driven exclusion. This study seeks to understand how the novel serves as a vehicle for subaltern expression and resistance. to explore the following. Specifically, the study addresses the following questions. In what ways do the food narratives found in *Dalit Kitchens of Marathwada* serve as cultural memory? How do these culinary stories resist dominant caste hierarchies and reshape food politics through the lens of gastropolitics? The food narratives from Dalit kitchens not only convey Dalit memory, and resistance to caste-based social marginalization, but also open up a dialogue about how these culinary stories maintain collective memory, confront prevailing caste systems, and affirm Dalit identity and resilience. How do the food practices of Dalit communities, as

depicted in the narrative, function as a means of reclaiming agency and asserting their identity against hegemonic social structures?

Chapter Two

Theorizing Caste, Memory, and the Politics of Food

The term subaltern originally referred to individuals of lower rank. In contemporary discourse, particularly within postcolonial and critical theory, it denotes groups that are socially, politically, economically, and culturally marginalized. These groups lack access to power, representation, and authoritative voice. The term broadly includes colonized populations, peasants, lower castes, women, poor labourers, and economically disadvantaged communities who are excluded from dominant institutions and mainstream narratives.

The concept was first used by Antonio Gramsci to describe groups excluded from hegemonic power structures. It was then developed within postcolonial theory through the Subaltern Studies collective, led by Ranajit Guha. Among the most influential theorists of subalternity is Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, whose seminal essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* interrogates whether marginalized subjects can truly represent themselves within dominant discourses.

Spivak argues that although subaltern groups possess lived experiences and voices, their expressions are frequently mediated, reshaped, or silenced by the systems of power such as colonialism, patriarchy, and Western epistemology, in her essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Even when they appear to "speak," their voices are filtered through elite frameworks that distort or appropriate their realities. She further extends this analysis to gender, demonstrating how colonial and patriarchal forces intersect to silence Third World women in both academic and political spheres. Her intervention

underscores the urgent need to recognize perspectives historically excluded from intellectual discourse.

Subaltern voice refers to the narratives and lived experiences of marginalized communities striving to assert identity, culture, and agency against structures that have silenced or misrepresented them. Recognizing these voices creates space for them within dominant cultural frameworks and challenges the already established hegemonic modes of representation. These narratives also preserve the shared memories of oppression, exclusion, and resistance experienced by the community across generations. The representations of collective experiences and memories can be understood through the lens of cultural trauma theory. Developed by Jeffrey C. Alexander and Neil Smelser, it examines trauma as a collective experience shared by communities or social groups. This theory elucidates how painful historical events can leave enduring psychological scars that reshape a group's collective memory and identity over time.

Alexander identifies two key viewpoints within trauma theory: the Enlightenment perspective and the psychoanalytic perspective. The Enlightenment view sees trauma as a rational response to abrupt social upheaval, while the psychoanalytic view emphasizes elements like repression, unconscious fears, and disruptive memory. However, Alexander critiques both perspectives for assuming that trauma is a direct result of the events themselves.

He contends that trauma is influenced more by representations, narratives, and public discourse than by the events alone. Various entities, including media, institutions, political leaders, and social groups, play crucial roles in shaping how societies

understand suffering and recall traumatic events. Alexander refers to these entities as carrier groups because they contribute to the development and dissemination of trauma narratives within society.

In India, writers such as Arjun Dangle contributed to expanding the literary and political dimensions of subaltern identity. Dalit literature emerged as a powerful form of resistance based on lived realities. Prominent figures including B. R. Ambedkar, Anna Bhau Sathe, Namdeo Dhasal, Daya Pawar, and Urmila Power shaped this movement through novels, poetry, and autobiographies that confront caste oppression and systemic marginalization. Within Indian English literature, Mulk Raj Anand played a crucial role in portraying the suffering and resilience of marginalized communities in his works. His narratives explore exploitation, humiliation, and resistance, thereby articulating voices historically suppressed. Ultimately, subaltern writing in India functions as a critical intervention against social injustice, privileging lived experience over romanticized representation.

Dalit food narratives in India question and challenge upper-caste dominated culinary traditions by recording experiences of caste oppression, hunger, exclusion, survival, and resistance. In these narratives, food is not treated merely as a source of nourishment; instead, it becomes a political, cultural, and social marker that exposes the realities of caste discrimination. Through autobiographies, testimonies, ethnographies, and critical writings, Dalit writers and scholars reclaim culinary histories that have long been ignored in mainstream Indian discourse.

In this regard, Shahu Patole's *Dalit Kitchens of Marathwada* occupies a critical contribution to Dalit food studies. Blending memoir, ethnography, and cookbook

traditions, the work actively documents the culinary history of Dalit communities in Maharashtra such that the work is today the most important source of information in this field. Although scholarly engagement with the text is still limited, existing reviews and studies highlight its significance in documenting marginalized culinary traditions and examining the relationship between caste, food, labour, and identity.

Angel Sophan, in her review "Dalit Kitchens of Marathwada: Shahu Patole" published in *CASTE: A Global Journal on Social Exclusion*, examines the text as a significant contribution to caste and food studies. She argues that Patole records the culinary traditions of the Mahar and Mang communities and demonstrates how food practices are shaped by caste-based discrimination. Sophan further observes that dominant vegetarian ideologies marginalize Dalit food cultures and presents food as a medium through which identity, memory, and resistance are expressed. She also acknowledges the book's contribution to discussions on food politics by bringing marginalized food cultures into academic discourse. According to her, *Dalit Kitchens of Marathwada* "stands out as more than just another addition; it challenges a space typically dominated by upper-caste dishes and cooking methods" (Sophan 495).

Santhosh J., in his book review published in *Contemporary Voice of Dalit*, situates Patole's work within the broader context of Dalit literature and social history. The review highlights the relationship between food, labour, caste oppression, and economic inequality. Santhosh interprets the text through an Ambedkarite perspective and suggests that food practices become forms of resistance against caste hierarchy. The review also emphasizes the importance of documenting everyday culinary experiences as a means of preserving Dalit histories and challenging dominant cultural narratives.

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Suraj Yengde, in his review published in *Hindustan Times*, argues that *Dalit Kitchens of Marathwada* challenges dominant ideas of Indian cuisine by foregrounding the food traditions of marginalized communities. According to Yengde, Patole reconstructs neglected culinary histories and exposes the influence of caste on everyday food practices. He appreciates the way in which the text combines recipes with social and cultural commentary, transforming food narratives into a means of social critique. Yengde further suggests that the work demonstrates how food can become a lens through which questions of caste, identity, and power can be understood.

Kiran Das, Saswat Samay Das, and Dibyendu Sahana (2025), in their article "Tasting Caste: Dalit Foodways, Gendered Labor, and Resistance in Dalit Kitchens of Marathwada" published in the *Journal for Cultural Research*, examine the intersections of caste, gender, labour, and food practices. The authors argue that Dalit food cultures function as forms of resistance that challenge Brahmanical notions of purity and pollution. Their study focuses particularly on gendered labour within Dalit households and demonstrates how culinary traditions preserve collective memory, cultural identity, and political resistance. By situating Patole's work within contemporary debates on food politics and cultural resistance, the article provides a deeper understanding of the significance of the text.

Existing studies on *Dalit Kitchens of Marathwada* primarily focus on caste, Dalit food cultures, gendered labour, and resistance. Although some scholars acknowledge the relationship between food, memory, and identity, limited attention has been given to examining the text through an integrated framework of Subaltern Studies, cultural memory, gastropolitics, and cultural trauma. This study attempts to address this gap by analysing how food narratives function as repositories of collective memory,

preserve subaltern histories, and operate as everyday forms of resistance against caste-based marginalization.

It is noteworthy that Patole's text extends beyond documenting culinary traditions. It explores the emotional and sensory dimensions intertwined with them - pride, shame, marginalization, and resistance. Through detailed food narratives, the work reveals the affective dimensions of caste oppression: the stigma imposed by upper-caste control over what Dalits could eat or prepare, contrasted with the dignity and cultural affirmation found in sustaining these practices within their communities. Everyday acts such as cooking thus become sites where power is asserted and resistance is enacted.

The text functions as an affective archive, recording the emotional lives of the Mahar and Mang communities through Patole's first-hand experiences. Rather than relying on abstract historical analysis, it foregrounds lived realities, the denial of access to common water sources, exclusion from communal feasts, prohibition from sacred eating rituals, and the constant negotiation of food within caste hierarchies. By documenting these everyday experiences, the work demonstrates how emotions such as pride, shame, pleasure, and resistance shape both individual subjectivity and collective identity.

This works gains particular significance as mainstream Marathi literature and media largely ignored Dalit food culture. It was the dominant castes' cuisine that was represented as the whole of Marathi culture. It was glorified and celebrated, while Dalit kitchens remained invisible. This silence and exclusion themselves became part of collective memory. Hence, over time, the practices of the lower castes became not only

ways of survival but also markers of caste identity. By carefully documenting recipes and food rituals, Patole tries to show that Marathwada has a broader and shared culinary culture that goes beyond what the upper classes have traditionally represented. Patole presents his culture as ordinary yet meaningful, not as something exotic or romanticized. He describes everyday practices with clarity and detail. There were also periods of scarcity and famine, and these experiences became part of their food memory. The famine of 1972 had a deep impact on rural food culture in Marathwada. The memory of that crisis still survives in modified recipes and in the collective resilience of the community.

The work asserts that the food narratives included in it cannot be understood as mere recipes of a household archived as individual memory. Rather, it represents cultural memory, which is a shared understanding of the past preserved and transmitted across generations. As Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka observe, "cultural memory preserves the store of knowledge from which a group derives an awareness of its unity and peculiarity" (130). In other words, it foregrounds lived experiences expressed through shared meanings, symbols, traditions, and narratives, all of which are deeply rooted in rituals, language, and cultural practices. This is sustained through everyday practices, spanning across conversations, celebrations, meals, and greetings to the sharing of traditions. These routine actions function as living expressions and carriers that continually transmit and reinforce the community's cultural memory. This understanding helps explain how Patole's documentation of Dalit food practices preserves the collective identity and shared experiences of the Mahar and Mang communities.

Dalit Kitchens of Marathwada demonstrates that cultural memory is preserved not through monuments or official records, but through culinary practices, kitchens, fields, and shared meals. These memories are transmitted through the sharing of bakhri, the grinding of spices, and the creation of distinctive food practices shaped by limited resources. Here, kitchen becomes a historical site, and everyday practices function as archives of caste, labour, resilience, and identity. Cultural memory, therefore, is not abstract; it is living, embodied, and sensory, experienced through taste, touch, smell, and communal participation, concerned with the "social, medial, and cognitive processes, and their ceaseless interplay" (Erll 6). In this respect, it is noteworthy that Patole does not emphasize historical dates or political events but highlights everyday life elements like cooking, acquiring resources for survival, and cultural rituals. He illustrates how food choices, cooking methods, and societal judgments about dietary habits are closely tied to caste hierarchy. As a result, daily food practices serve as vessels for social memory.

A key focus of the book is the intersection of vegetarianism and caste superiority. Vegetarianism is historically promoted as a morally superior practice, while the dietary habits of the Mahar and Mang communities are stigmatized and considered taboo due to their consumption of buffalo and other meats. Vegetarianism became linked to notions of purity and morality, particularly following the Buddhist reform movements. In his influential work *Annihilation of Caste*, B. R. Ambedkar maintained that dietary restrictions function as intentional strategies for maintaining societal dominance rather than authentic religious tenets. This also meant that the upper-castes preferred to gatekeep their culinary knowledge, food experiences, and resources:

> Access to the kitchen was impossible. But they were given the excess food, sometimes leftover and stale food where the decaying process had just begun. The original taste of the food was rarely available for their enjoyment. The only exception was festival days. On such occasions, one could guess what ingredients were used in it. They could only guess because they did not have the freedom to ask for the recipes. (Patole 44)

Often lacking access to the spaces and lives of upper-caste households, the lower castes could only make educated guesses about the ingredients when they tasted these dishes during special occasions. Further, many of those ingredients were financially unattainable for them. Faced with limited resources, they created their own recipes from what was available. Patole examines the reasons some communities were compelled to take on roles like disposing of deceased cattle and how this necessity influenced their dietary practices. Over time, these roles evolved into survival mechanisms and indicators of caste identity. Therefore, eating specific types of meat transcends basic nutritional needs; it is historically influenced by social marginalization. Thus, Dalit food practices were marginalized not due to nutritional inferiority, but because caste ideology deemed them impure. This stigma led to shared experiences of humiliation and exclusion that became ingrained in Dalit cultural memory. The preparation of shidori, the exchange of food between families, the use of grains as confetti, and the collective participation in cooking all reflected social relationships, economic conditions, and caste-based negotiations. Their customs were different from those of the upper castes. For example, they did not follow the practice of dowry.

Language serves as a vital repository of cultural memory within the text. Patole captures particular culinary terms like bhakri and shidori, which signify more than just

food; they represent survival, community bonds, and rural identity. Terms such as Balutedari link labour to caste structures and resource access, highlighting the impact of occupation on daily life. The frequent reference to caste names like Mahar and Mang carries significant historical implications, echoing shared experiences of marginalization and resilience. Moreover, the use of local meat terminology and expressions specific to the community illustrates how culinary language evolved within distinct social contexts. By documenting this language, the book safeguards a cultural landscape shaped by labour, caste, and survival, transforming vocabulary into a repository of collective memory.

The Balutedari system further explains how labour and food were closely connected, showing how occupational roles influenced access to resources and shaped everyday dietary practices. Dalits have historically been seen as individuals meant to serve the higher castes, with their fundamental rights frequently dictated by those in superior social positions. Patole does not idealize Dalit food culture; he confronts the shame, discomfort, and internalized stigma present within the community. Many Dalits are reluctant to share their food customs publicly because such discussions are often framed as unsophisticated. As a result, cultural memory can sometimes evoke fear and judgment instead of comfort. Patole seeks to transform this sense of shame into empowerment; he does not seek to glorify their experiences but rather to highlight how their culture embodies themes of oppression, resistance, and survival. The idea of "eat and let eat" promotes mutual respect while revealing that discussions about food often conceal deeper caste-related anxieties. Consequently, the act of eating becomes a form of political resistance against established hierarchies.

They were forced by scarcity into adaptation and prioritization. They did not have direct access to wells and had to dig small seepage ditches near water bodies to avoid polluted water. The limited quantity of water was carefully prioritized - first for cooking and drinking, and only later for hygiene. Fuel scarcity was another major challenge. Matchboxes were unaffordable for these poor communities, so they had to fetch fire from neighbouring houses. They preserved dried cow dung mixed with inferior inflammable materials such as corn straw and husks, which were used during the rainy season. Agricultural waste was also used as fuel. In contrast, upper castes did not need to substitute as much, as their kitchens were materially stable:

> To use proper wood was a luxury for these two communities. Mang and Mahar men would break wood for others till their hands were blistered...all they would get in return was bhakri (jowar or bajra flatbread) and buttermilk. In summers, the women used to collect wood by breaking down worn-out fences. For that they had to beg the farm owner for hours. The fence was mainly made of acacia and occasionally jamun (Malabar plum) branches...Sugarcane waste after harvest was brought to heat water. Women would also bring leftovers of other crops to be used as fuel. The dry shrubs left after harvesting pigeon peas were thorny and would cause a deep wound if handled carelessly...any agricultural waste or solid wood on public land or nearby forests...and when such trees fell naturally due to age or a storm. (Patole 55)

Mahars and Mangs could not afford metal utensils, pol-pat, musal, or jaate. They often borrowed utensils from neighbours, reflecting a shared culture of interdependence. Limited tools shaped their cooking techniques and encouraged improvisation.

Food selections and dietary standards have mirrored and reinforced social hierarchies, power dynamics, and cultural identities. By applying the concept of gastropolitics, we can grasp how and why food serves as a domain of political significance, conflict, and exclusion rather than simply being related to flavour or nutrition. Gastropolitics refers to the struggles and negotiations over resources and social meanings that are expressed through food practices (Appadurai, 1981). In this sense, food operates as a symbolic system through which social hierarchies are maintained and communicated. In caste-structured societies, dietary rules regulate commensality, define what foods are acceptable, and classify items as pure or impure. Within this structure, vegetarianism is often elevated as morally superior to meat consumption. Seen from this perspective, food acts as a powerful symbol of cultural identity, while debates and struggles over food rules and accessibility reveal broader patterns of social marginalization. Dietary norms and practices may either sustain or challenge existing structural inequalities. Thus, food-related activities go beyond simple preparation and consumption; they express deeper social meanings connected to identity, hierarchy, and relations of power. By applying gastropolitical theory, we examine how food functions both as a site of caste oppression and as a space for cultural resistance.

When we analyse *Dalit Kitchens of Marathwada* through this lens, it becomes clear that Shahu Patole strongly questions the Brahmanical caste system that controls food habits and social status. They were not expected to follow ritual fasting practices like Chaturmas in the same way upper castes did. But this does not mean they were free from restrictions. On the other hand, they were already excluded from the sacred social order. In the Brahmanical framework, food is divided into categories like sattvic, rajasic,

and tamasic. Sattvic food is considered pure and spiritually superior and is mainly associated with upper-caste practices. However, tamasic food is treated as impure and morally inferior, and it is usually linked with lower-caste communities. In this way, vegetarianism becomes a symbol of purity, while meat consumption, especially beef, is marked as polluting. Through these religious classifications, upper-caste groups regulate food practices and maintain caste hierarchy. Patole writes about the Shudratishudra, the communities who were placed outside the four varnas. The food practices of Mahar and Mang communities included beef, buffalo meat, pork, and even the flesh of dead animals. Animals were treated as sacred when they were alive, but once they died naturally, they became impure. To protect the so-called ritual purity of the village, a separate barren space was assigned for carcass disposal, and only the Mahar and Mang castes were permitted to handle this work. Even the language used shows this social division. Those who avoided eating the flesh of dead animals called it mati (waste), whereas those who consumed it called it bhaji (food). So here, "non-vegetarian" does not simply mean eating meat. It refers to food that is already marked by caste stigma, hierarchy, and the idea of ritual pollution.

The text also records different kinds of meat and body parts, explaining how they were prepared and consumed. Helya denotes buffalo meat, while halal and jhatka indicate two different slaughtering methods. Items like rakti (blood) and dishes such as lakuti, along with organs like lungs (fofis), trachea (gana), liver (kalij), kidneys (boka), brain (mendu), tongue (jeebh), and epiglottis (fashi), are all carefully described. Each has its own name, taste, and cooking technique. Certain beliefs are also attached to these foods. For example, fashi was sometimes given to lactating mothers, and offering liver

and kidneys was considered a gesture of honour. This shows that every organ has both culinary importance and social meaning.

Here meat functions at a social and cultural level. It determines caste-based occupations such as disposal, skinning, and slaughtering. It maintains the boundaries between purity and pollution. It creates systems of respect and insult, where serving liver or kidneys signifies honour. It even becomes a source of humour, as seen in the tamasha pun on fashi. Language and abuses such as "rakti-chatya" also emerge from these practices. Women's roles in cooking and the preparation of special dishes for mothers reflect gendered dimensions, while childhood memories are shaped by experiences of eating marrow, brain, and other soft parts. Thus, meat in this context is not just food. It becomes a marker of caste identity, cultural memory, lived experience, and social relationships; sometimes "an identity constructed by casteism" (Natrajan 8).

The book also highlights the contradiction in caste society. Upper-caste people depended on Dalits for essential work such as making brooms, doing leatherwork, sanitation, and digging wells. Yet they treated them as untouchable. After Dalits made brooms, purification rituals were performed to make the object acceptable, but the dignity of the people who made it was ignored. Similarly, Dalits who dug wells for the whole village were not allowed to use the water. Their labour was necessary, but their presence was seen as polluting.

Another important point Patole shows is the psychological impact of purity and pollution. Constantly being told that their food is impure creates internalized shame among Dalits about their own culture. In mixed-caste gatherings, they often hide their traditional meat practices and serve "acceptable" foods like mutton to upper-caste

guests. In this way, purity becomes not only a religious idea but also an emotional burden that leads to self-control and fear of judgment. Through these examples, Patole makes it clear that purity and pollution are not just ritual ideas. They are powerful tools that control food, labour, dignity, and even the way people see themselves. In Dalit setting, vegetarianism is understood quite differently than the upper-caste ideals of ritual purity and superiority associated with sattvic food. For the Mahar and Mang communities, opting for vegetarian meals was not a moral or spiritual decision but rather a necessity dictated by agricultural work, poverty, and seasonal limitations. Meat was eaten only sporadically, prompting women to innovate with a variety of pulse and grain-based dishes, including dal, pithla, usal, peanut preparations, daalga, kalana bhakri, and pendpala. These meals represent not purity but survival and resourcefulness, embodying a practice that values minimal waste. Additionally, the caste system influenced food practices, with labourers often segregated during food preparation, and any peanuts handled by Mahar or Mang women deemed impure. Wages were frequently given in goods rather than cash, further entrenching economic and social disparities. Therefore, in this context, vegetarian food does not signify ritual purity; it becomes a focal point where caste, labour, poverty, and untouchability converge.

To further develop the gastropolitical reading, the ideas of food studies of scholars Fabio Parasecoli are particularly useful. In "Gastronativism: Food, Identity, Politics" (2022), Parasecoli employs the concept of gastronativism, to argue that dominant groups often frame certain foods as symbols of an "authentic" national identity while marginalizing other culinary traditions. In the Indian context, vegetarianism is frequently presented as pure and representative of national culture. Patole's work challenges this gastronativist framework by foregrounding Dalit food

traditions centred on meat, including beef and dried fish, which are commonly stigmatized in mainstream discourse. By documenting and affirming these practices, the text resists a homogenized understanding of Indian identity and exposes the caste-based moral hierarchies embedded in food politics.

While caste ideology structures food hierarchies in ritual and national contexts, it is important to examine how these hierarchies function within Dalit communities through the intersections of caste, gender, and class. The concept of intersectionality, introduced by Kimberle Crenshaw, explains how systems of oppression such as caste, gender, and class overlap and reinforce one another. In Patole's narrative, women are primarily responsible for cooking with whatever limited ingredients are available. Caste-based landlessness and occupational restrictions restrict the resources accessible to the community, and it is Dalit women who manage scarcity within the household. They stretch small quantities of grain, reuse leftovers, prepare meat, and sustain their families under structural marginalization. Thus, the Dalit kitchen becomes a site where caste oppression and patriarchy intersect where "food becomes a reminder of their degraded social position" (Parvathi 2717) and as Gopal Guru rightly notes, "the upper castes have not only prescribed food for themselves, they have designated foods for other castes as well as their staple foods" (151) reinforcing the social hierarchy. Patole writes how this prescription and the social order ensured the lower castes had limited access to resources, like milk and milk products. Procuring them was not easy for the lower castes:

> Getting hold of buttermilk, the cheapest of the lot, was also not that easy. In order to get buttermilk from rich households, they had to do some chores in return. Few of this community could keep a cow or buffalo as

> they lacked the means. Women would go and ask for buttermilk for their young children—hopefully without having to do anything in return. There was no surety that it would be given. Sometimes they would not ask for it straight out as they felt ashamed, and would start with roundabout small talk as a way to work towards the request for free buttermilk. Hence the saying, 'Don't try to hide, don't try to bilk, when you all you want is the buttermilk.' (Patole 60)

Dalit women often had to beg for buttermilk, had little access to dairy products, and sometimes received only small amounts or spoiled leftovers. They worked both inside and outside the home. At the same time, the kitchen also becomes a space of resilience. Women preserve recipes, pass on food traditions, and transform stigmatized ingredients into meaningful cultural practices. Through this perspective, resistance itself becomes intersectional. Dalit women worked outside, cooked food, collected fuel, and took care of children at the same time. Because of this heavy labour, cooking had to be time-efficient and practical. In contrast, upper-caste women often did not engage in agricultural labour and had more domestic stability.

In conclusion, *Dalit Kitchens of Marathwada* shows that food is not merely a matter of nourishment but a living repository of cultural memory formed through caste relations, labour conditions, gender roles, and acts of resistance. Through detailed attention to everyday cooking practices, Shahu Patole presents the Dalit kitchen as a space where histories of oppression exist alongside forms of endurance and strength. Analysing the work using the theories of cultural memory, gastropolitics, purity and pollution, gastronativism, and intersectionality, food emerges as a deeply political arena shaped by unequal power structures. Practices such as the glorification of

vegetarianism, the construction of moral hierarchies, the exploitation of labour, and the internalization of shame function together to uphold caste dominance. But the careful preservation of recipes, culinary vocabulary, and shared rituals also turns the kitchen into a place of cultural affirmation and survival.

Chapter 3

Food, Memory, and Resistance: A Gastropolitical Reading of *Dalit Kitchens of Marathwada*

Food in *Dalit Kitchens of Marathwada* is not merely connected to sustenance or culinary practice; rather, it functions as an archive of collective memory, historical experience, and cultural transmission. The text demonstrates how food practices preserve histories and lived realities often excluded from official narratives. Through cooking, eating, and sharing meals, Patole reveals the everyday experiences of oppression, exclusion, survival, and resistance within marginalized communities. In this sense, the work aligns with Subaltern Studies by attempting to recover voices and histories neglected by dominant discourse.

This chapter examines how kitchens, recipes, rituals, and food narratives function as repositories of cultural memory. It also analyses how everyday culinary practices become sites through which Dalit communities negotiate identity, preserve collective experience, and resist caste-based erasure. In the text, the kitchen emerges not merely as a domestic space but as a repository of intergenerational knowledge and lived experience. From the preface itself, Patole connects food practices to both memory and history, suggesting that culinary traditions preserve experiences beyond written documentation. This reflects the concept of embodied memory, where knowledge is transmitted through repetition, observation, and everyday practice rather than through formal records.

Subaltern communities have historically remained excluded from dominant narratives and denied the opportunity to define their own identities. In this context, Patole's question, "What about us?" (1), becomes a plea for recognition within a society structured by caste hierarchy. The question also reflects how knowledge production itself is shaped by power. By grounding the narrative in lived experience, the text resists cultural erasure and challenges upper-caste monopolization of representation.

Patole critiques the representation of food in television programmes, cookbooks, food vlogs and mainstream media, arguing that these spaces frequently present elite food culture as representative of Indian cuisine as a whole. While contemporary culinary discourse appears to celebrate diversity, Patole suggests that such representations are often selective and exclusionary in nature. Food traditions associated with dominant castes and economically privileged groups receive greater visibility and recognition, whereas the culinary practices of marginalized communities remain absent from mainstream discussions. In fact, it can be doubtlessly stated that regional Indian cuisines are a manifestation of this highly stratified system, and bound in their Indianness not by flavour, spice or technique, but by an adherence to caste-based exclusionary measures. He points out that Dalit food cultures have rarely been regarded as worthy subjects of study and that references to Dalit food in earlier literary writings were often brief, incomplete and lacking in details regarding recipes, methods of preparation and their cultural significance (Patole 24). As a result, the food practices of Dalit communities have remained largely undocumented and excluded from public discourse. This inspires Patole to ask questions like:

> why don't they include non-vegetarian food as part of our primitive, age-old traditions?...Do they feel that the cuisine of a region is defined and

> limited by the food culture of the upper classes? Or do they pretend that they have no knowledge about the food history of this fifth category? What did the people outside the elite sphere eat every day? What do they eat today? What are their nourishments, delicacies, snacks and desserts? What festivals do they celebrate? What are the special meals prepared for festivals? What do they serve their guests? Why don't the writers, bloggers, columnists, filmmakers, etc., ever ask such simple questions? (3)

This disproportionate representation and moralising about vegetarianism, grounded in Brahminical traditions, reinforces dietary hierarchies based on caste. Patole contextualises this within India's rigid caste stratification. This reflects the politics of food representation, where power operates not merely through force but also through normalization and internalization. Shame and fear contribute to silence, while media reinforces dominant standards of taste and culture. Through this critique, Patole exposes how culinary discourse itself becomes shaped by caste and class hierarchy.

Patole further exposes the politics embedded within food representation by questioning who has the authority to define what constitutes Indian cuisine. He argues that food narratives are shaped by structures of caste and class, where certain culinary traditions are celebrated and legitimized while others are ignored and stigmatized. The food culture in India is deeply aligned with caste and class divisions, and the dietary practices of marginalized communities are often viewed through the lens of prejudice and social hierarchy. By documenting the food cultures of the Mahar and Mang communities, *Dalit Kitchens of Marathwada* challenges these dominant representations and brings attention to histories and traditions that have long been silenced within

mainstream culinary narratives, extending the documentation "beyond simple ethnography to become a decolonial project that challenges the upper-caste appropriation of India's food heritage and advocates for epistemic justice for subaltern culinary traditions" (Das et. al. 6).

Through this process of documentation, Patole reclaims Dalit culinary traditions as important cultural archives that preserve memories, experiences and histories of marginalized communities. The book presents food not merely as a means of sustenance but as a marker of identity, a repository of collective memory and a form of resistance against caste-based oppression. By foregrounding the everyday experiences and food practices of the Mahar and Mang communities, *Dalit Kitchens of Marathwada* critiques the casteist and classist structures that continue to influence contemporary food discourse and asserts the significance of Dalit food cultures within the broader landscape of Indian cuisine. Patole asserts that "food culture seems to be firmly aligned along caste and class divides"(10). The text directly connects food practices with the varna system, where dietary habits become associated with ritual hierarchy and caste identity. Brahmins are linked with strict vegetarianism and notions of purity, while other caste groups are assigned different food practices based on occupation and ritual status. Outside this fourfold hierarchy are Dalit communities, historically excluded as Shudratishudras.

The text demonstrates how caste hierarchy is legitimized through religious mythology and normalized through everyday practices. Ideas of purity and pollution regulate not only social relations but also culinary identity. Animals themselves are symbolically divided according to caste logic, "derivative of the casteist food hierarchy that assigns a pure and polluted status to particular foods and to those who consume

them" (Natrajan 6). The cow is associated with sacredness and purity within Vedic tradition, whereas the buffalo is represented as impure and inferior, reflecting the social positioning of marginalized communities such as the Mahars and Mangs.

Patole exposes the contradiction embedded within dominant food politics by highlighting how foreign culinary practices involving the consumption of various kinds of meat are often celebrated as symbols of cosmopolitanism, sophistication and cultural diversity "without any shame or disgust" (Patole 5), whereas similar food practices among marginalized communities within India are face domestic stigmatisation and silencing (Das et. al. 5). This contradiction reveals that the politics of food is not determined merely by dietary choices but by the social identities and power structures associated with those choices. Through such observations, Patole demonstrates that food practices are deeply influenced by caste hierarchies, where certain cuisines are granted cultural legitimacy and prestige while others are subjected to ridicule and exclusion.

This selective validation of food cultures can be understood through the lens of gastropolitics, which helps explain how food functions as a cultural and political category through which systems of dominance and exclusion are negotiated and maintained. In the Indian context, dietary practices have historically been linked with notions of purity and pollution, thereby reinforcing caste distinctions and social inequalities. Patole questions why the consumption of meat in international cuisines is often accepted and appreciated, while similar practices among Dalit communities continue to be condemned and marginalized. Such a double standard reveals that culinary morality is not neutral but is shaped by existing social hierarchies and ideological frameworks.

Patole's critique challenges the authority of dominant groups in determining what constitutes acceptable food culture and legitimate culinary knowledge. The exclusion of Dalit food practices from mainstream discourse reflects broader processes of cultural silencing and marginalization. By documenting the food traditions of the Mahar and Mang communities, *Dalit Kitchens of Marathwada* resists these hegemonic narratives and reclaims marginalized culinary practices as important expressions of caste-identity, memory and cultural survival. In doing so, the text not only interrogates caste-based notions of purity and pollution but also foregrounds food as a site through which questions of power, representation and resistance can be critically examined.

The text also critiques the reduction of regional food culture into selective upper-caste dishes such as *puran poli* and *misal*, which came to represent authentic Maharashtrian cuisine. Such representation erases Dalit food practices and reinforces upper-caste dominance over cultural identity. Dalit culinary traditions rooted in scarcity, substitution, and survival remain excluded from dominant definitions of cuisine and aesthetics. Through these representations, standards of taste and value are socially constructed. Foods associated with marginalized communities are treated as inferior or shameful, while upper-caste culinary practices are normalized as refined and respectable. Taste therefore becomes political rather than natural. As a result, these representations instil a deep sense of trauma experienced by marginalized communities. In turn, it creates an internalized belief that their culture, food practices, and way of life are inferior, which further produces feelings of shame and inadequacy.

In *Dalit Kitchens of Marathwada*, memories of hunger, caste stigma, untouchability, scarcity, and humiliation are preserved through culinary practices and oral traditions. The text shows that food functions not merely as nourishment but also

as a repository of collective suffering, survival, and lived experiences. As a result, trauma becomes embedded within everyday life through kitchens, rituals, labour, and food memories. The repeated internalization of shame surrounding Dalit food practices reveals how caste trauma continues psychologically and culturally across generation. In *Dalit Kitchens of Marathwada*, Shahu Patole highlights the psychological burden imposed on Dalit communities through the stigmatization of their food practices. He observes that, "They don't come forward to talk about their food culture, thanks to the sense of shame attached to their own food history and practices" (Patole 20). This statement reveals that Dalit food traditions have long been associated with social disgrace, forcing communities to suppress an important aspect of their cultural identity. Rather than celebrating their culinary heritage, many Dalits remain hesitant to acknowledge it because of the caste-based prejudice attached to their food customs.

This silence reflects the cultural trauma embedded within Dalit food narratives. The persistent humiliation surrounding their food culture has transformed everyday eating practices into reminders of historical oppression and exclusion. Through this observation, Patole demonstrates that Dalit food is not merely a matter of cuisine but a site where memories of caste discrimination continue to shape identity, making the recovery and documentation of these food traditions an act of cultural reclamation.

Patole situates Dalit literature as a form of resistance against historical neglect, cultural exclusion and social marginalization. For centuries, the histories, traditions and everyday experiences of Dalit communities remained absent from mainstream literary and cultural narratives, which were largely shaped by dominant caste perspectives. The emergence of Dalit literature in the 1970s marked a significant shift, as marginalized communities began to narrate their own histories and document their lived realities,

serving "as an expression of the Dalit's social, cultural, economic, political and religious subjugation" (Das). Through autobiographies, poems, short stories and memoirs, Dalit writers challenged dominant literary traditions and brought attention to caste oppression, poverty, discrimination and social injustice that had long remained ignored within mainstream discourse. Dalit literature therefore became a means through which silenced communities reclaimed their histories and asserted their presence within literary and cultural spaces.

Patole presents Dalit literature as an important medium for preserving cultural memory and representing the experiences of ordinary people. Unlike dominant literary traditions that often overlooked Dalit lives and cultural practices, Dalit writing foregrounded the realities of marginalized communities and documented aspects of life that had remained unrecorded for generations. In *Dalit Kitchens of Marathwada*, Patole extends this intervention to the sphere of food by emphasizing that Dalit culinary traditions, dietary practices and food memories constitute an essential part of Dalit history and cultural heritage. Although food was occasionally mentioned in Dalit autobiographies, these references were often brief and incomplete, offering little information about recipes, methods of preparation or their cultural significance. The documentation of food practices therefore becomes an act of reclaiming histories that have been excluded from dominant narratives.

By recording the food cultures of the Mahar and Mang communities, Patole transforms food writing into a form of resistance against caste-based exclusion and cultural erasure. *Dalit Kitchens of Marathwada* moves beyond narratives of suffering to preserve everyday practices, collective memories and cultural traditions that have remained invisible within mainstream discourse. The text highlights food not merely as

a source of sustenance but as a repository of memory, identity and lived experience. Through this act of documentation, Patole preserves marginalized histories and challenges dominant notions of Indian cuisine, purity and pollution, while asserting Dalit food traditions as significant expressions of cultural identity and resistance.

The text argues that lower-caste communities were historically misrepresented within mythology, Sanskrit literature, saint literature, and Marathi historical texts such as the Bakhars. Literature remained controlled by elite groups, and only upper-caste lives were considered worthy of preservation. Dalit communities were represented as impure, inferior, or invisible. Ignorance therefore functioned as a form of oppression, while silence reinforced marginalization. There are works about poor Brahmins and their sufferings as well but in the same village Dalit's sufferings got neglected. Patole tells:

> Poverty, suffering and the eating habits of this class were always taken for granted by the upper classes. In the folk tales of the upper classes, stories about a poor Brahmin living in a village were common. But in the same village, there were many Dalits living in abject poverty. This, however, was never acknowledged. (6)

Dalit literature marks a turning point because it reclaims visibility through the documentation of everyday life, labour, traditions, and suffering. Yet Patole points out that even within Dalit literature, food culture remained largely undocumented due to internalized shame and social stigma surrounding Dalit food practices. The text challenges stereotypes that reduce Dalit food culture merely to meat consumption and demonstrates how food becomes a marker of caste identity and social status. Patole

argues that "who eats what" often matters more within caste society than ethical behaviour itself. Vegetarianism becomes associated with pride and superiority, while Dalit communities internalize shame regarding their own food habits.

This internalized stigma becomes visible when marginalized communities modify their food practices to appear socially acceptable before upper-caste guests. Such practices reveal how the desire for social acceptance emerges under unequal power relations. The text also discusses the conversion of Dalits, particularly Mahars, to Buddhism under the leadership of B. R. Ambedkar. The conversion was both religious and cultural, functioning as a rejection of caste oppression and Brahmanical ideology. Patole presents conversion as a form of psychological and social liberation. Dalits were historically made to believe that their suffering resulted from karma and previous lives. Conversion therefore became an act of resistance against religious justification of inequality. Through Buddhism, communities reconstructed themselves as Nav-Buddhists and attempted to reclaim dignity and self-respect.

The text also explains how Dalit food practices developed through occupational conditions, poverty, and scarcity rather than through religious influence. Practices such as beef and pork consumption emerged from social exclusion and limited access to resources. Food habits therefore reflect structured oppression rather than moral inferiority. Patole questions the assumption that vegetarianism is inherently connected to purity or morality. The text points out that meat consumption existed historically within Hindu traditions and that the Manusmriti itself does not entirely prohibit it. Vegetarianism later gained prominence through Jain and Buddhist reform movements, but eventually became integrated into structures of caste power.

Through literature, religion, and social discourse, upper-caste vegetarian practices came to be normalized as universal standards. Dalit food practices were labelled tamasic, impure, and inferior, producing internalized shame among marginalized communities. This process reflects cultural hegemony, where dominant groups establish their own practices as natural and morally superior. Food in the text also functions as a site of political negotiation and power struggle. Through the concept of gastropolitics, food becomes connected to conflicts over social control, hierarchy, and cultural authority.

The Kaaran ritual illustrates this dynamic clearly. In this ritual, a buffalo is sacrificed and distributed among Dalit communities through a communal feast. The ritual is provided by the upper-caste groups who provide the buffalo. Yet, they do not consume the meat themselves. Instead, the ritual becomes a mechanism through which caste hierarchy and dependency are maintained. The text illustrates how religion legitimizes inequality by presenting such practices as sacred and necessary. He says:

> They were paying for the sins of a past birth. They were living this life for the sake of atonement. Not a single saint or godman came to their rescue to take them out of their supposedly despicable food culture, discouraged them from eating it or provided them with an option of alternative nutritious, simple food. (Patole 18)

During times of hunger, disease, and scarcity, marginalized communities interpret suffering as divine punishment and turn to ritual for relief. Yet what compels participation is not faith alone but also poverty and lack of access to nutrition. The ritual therefore manages hunger without addressing structural oppression. Food distribution

follows caste hierarchy, and dependency becomes disguised as charity and devotion. Rituals such as Kaaran reveals how power operates indirectly through belief systems and normalized practices. Power operates not only through coercion but also through the manufacture of consent(Gramsci), enabling social inequalities to appear natural and legitimate. Within such hegemonic structures, caste-based rituals and food practices are internalized as sacred traditions rather than recognized as mechanisms of exclusion. These hierarchies are further sustained through symbolic violence, whereby relations of domination are misrecognized and accepted as part of the natural social order (Bourdieu). Everyday practices of cooking, eating, and commensality thus become sites of gastropolitics, where power is negotiated through food and its meanings (Appadurai). Spivak further remarks that these practices preserve marginalized histories and create spaces for the articulation of subaltern voices and lived experiences (56).The recipes and culinary practices in the text are not presented through fixed measurements or standardized instructions. Instead, they exist as flexible forms of embodied and oral knowledge passed down through observation, repetition, and everyday practice. Patole reveals how Dalit communities developed diverse vegetarian and non-vegetarian food practices within conditions of scarcity and caste inequality. Dishes such as *pithla, usal,* and peanut-based curries rely not on strict measurements but on experience and practical knowledge.

This culinary knowledge is transmitted primarily through women, who sustain Dalit food culture through continuous labour and bodily memory. Skills such as grinding pulses, preparing pithla variations, and managing limited ingredients are learned through participation rather than formal teaching. Viewed through intersectionality, these practices reveal how caste, class, and gender intersect within the

Dalit kitchen. Dalit women remain central to preserving culinary traditions while simultaneously facing invisibility and social marginalization. Their knowledge is shaped by agrarian labour, poverty, scarcity, and seasonal conditions, making it adaptive and resourceful. Women play an important role in preparing, preserving, and passing on these food traditions from one generation to another, even though their work often goes unnoticed. Thus, food in the text becomes more than a part of culture; it reflects the different forms of discrimination experienced by Dalit communities, especially Dalit women.

The work also highlights that Dalit women experience oppression on multiple levels because of both their caste and gender. Along with facing the social stigma attached to their community's food practices, they are responsible for cooking, preserving, and maintaining these traditions despite poverty and discrimination. Their everyday labour helps preserve the cultural identity of the community, even when it is ignored or looked down upon by dominant society. Through these representations, Patole shows that Dalit food narratives are shaped by the combined effects of caste, class, occupation, and gender, revealing the complex realities of Dalit life.

At the same time, notions of purity and pollution continue to regulate these practices. Although Dalit women sustain essential food systems, their bodies remain stigmatized within caste society. Their labour becomes necessary, yet their touch is considered polluting in certain contexts. This contradiction exposes the structural inequalities embedded within caste-based food practices.

In conclusion, *Dalit Kitchens of Marathwada* demonstrates that food is far more than a means of sustenance; it serves as a repository of memory, identity, and resistance.

Through the representation of everyday culinary practices, Shahu Patole reveals how caste hierarchy, cultural trauma, social exclusion, and economic inequality are deeply embedded in food traditions. The work challenges dominant narratives that have historically erased Dalit food culture and reclaims it as an important part of Dalit history and identity. By documenting marginalized culinary practices and the experiences associated with them, Patole transforms the kitchen into a site of cultural preservation, political expression, and resistance against caste-based oppression. Thus, the text establishes Dalit food narratives as powerful testimonies of survival, resilience, and the continuing struggle for dignity and recognition.

Chapter Four

Conclusion

This dissertation has examined Shahu Patole's *Dalit Kitchens of Marathwada* through the theoretical frameworks of Subaltern Studies, particularly focusing on gastropolitics. The study shows how food in Patole's work is much more than a source of nourishment and acts as a medium through which the history, identity, and lived experiences of the Mahar and Mang communities are preserved and expressed. The text proves that everyday food practices carry memories of struggle, survival, and resistance, making the kitchen an important cultural space.

The study first explored the significance of food narratives in literature and culture. Food is not only essential for survival but also reflects history, labour, identity, relationships, and social hierarchy. In *Dalit Kitchens of Marathwada*, recipes, cooking methods, ingredients, and eating practices record the lives of communities that have remained absent from mainstream historical and literary narratives. Patole presents food as a carrier of collective memory, where every dish reflects the experiences of exclusion, hardship, adaptation, and resilience. Thus, the kitchen becomes a place where history is preserved through everyday practices.

The first chapter introduced the concept of food narratives and explained their importance in Dalit literature. It demonstrated that the food culture of the Mahar and Mang communities functions as both cultural memory and resistance. The chapter also showed that caste has historically influenced occupations, food habits, access to resources, and social relationships. As a result, food becomes a visible marker of caste

identity. By documenting the everyday food practices of Dalit communities, Patole challenges the dominant representation of Indian food culture and gives recognition to traditions that have long remained ignored.

The second chapter lays the theoretical foundation for this study. This framework helps analyse how Patole's work brings the forgotten voices of the margins to the centre by recording their food practices, labour, customs, and memories. Instead of presenting history through official documents, the text reconstructs it through everyday experiences preserved in kitchens, recipes, and oral traditions.

The concept of cultural memory further explains how knowledge and history are passed from one generation to another through daily practices. Cooking methods, food preparation, local vocabulary, rituals, and family traditions preserve the collective memories of the community. These practices help maintain cultural identity despite social oppression. Therefore, the Dalit kitchen becomes a living archive where memory is preserved through participation and everyday life rather than through written records alone.

The study also shows that Patole questions the dominant idea of Indian cuisine by highlighting the neglected food traditions of Dalit communities. Mainstream food narratives mainly celebrate upper-caste culinary practices while ignoring the rich diversity of Dalit food culture. By documenting recipes prepared with locally available ingredients and traditional knowledge, Patole preserves a valuable cultural heritage that has remained invisible for a long time. His work therefore serves both as a literary text and as a cultural record of marginalized communities.

Another important finding of this study is the close relationship between food and power. The text shows that caste influences every aspect of food, including what people eat, how food is prepared, and who has access to it. The ideas of purity and pollution have been used to justify social discrimination and maintain caste hierarchy. Patole exposes these beliefs as socially constructed rather than natural. Through his narrative, he reveals how food becomes a means through which inequality is created and sustained.

At the same time, the study demonstrates that food also becomes a powerful form of resistance. By recording recipes, preserving traditional food practices, and celebrating Dalit culinary knowledge, Patole reclaims a history that has long been ignored. The food practices that were once considered inferior become symbols of dignity, resilience, and cultural identity. In this way, *Dalit Kitchens of Marathwada* shows that resistance is not limited to political movements but is also expressed through everyday acts of cooking, remembering, and preserving tradition.

The analysis of *Dalit Kitchens of Marathwada* further shows that cultural memory is preserved not through official records or monuments but through everyday food practices. Cooking, sharing meals, preserving recipes, and passing culinary knowledge from one generation to another help in preserving the identity and history of the community. These everyday practices carry the memories of people who experienced caste discrimination, poverty, and social exclusion. Every recipe documented by Patole reflects the lived experiences of the Mahar and Mang communities and preserves a history that has often been ignored in mainstream historical narratives.

One of the major findings of this study is that food serves as a medium of cultural memory. Memory is not preserved only through written documents but also through everyday activities. Practices such as grinding grains, preparing bhakri, collecting water, storing seasonal ingredients, borrowing utensils, and preparing food with limited resources reflect the collective experiences of the community. These ordinary activities connect one generation with another and help preserve their cultural identity. Thus, the Dalit kitchen becomes a living space where history and memory continue through everyday life.

The study also highlights the importance of language in preserving cultural memory. Patole uses regional names of food items, ingredients, occupations, customs, and rituals that are closely connected to the lives of the Mahar and Mang communities. These words preserve cultural meanings and experiences that cannot be fully expressed through dominant cultural narratives. In this way, language itself becomes a record of identity, labour, and survival, helping to preserve a cultural heritage that has long remained marginalized.

The dissertation further shows that food cannot be separated from labour. Throughout the text, cooking, farming, collecting firewood, fetching water, processing grains, and preparing meals are closely linked to the caste-based division of labour. The Balutedari system discussed in this study explains how occupation determined people's access to food, resources, and social status. Economic conditions and caste restrictions shaped food habits and culinary practices. Therefore, food reflects not only personal choice but also the material and social conditions in which people lived.

Another important aspect highlighted in the study is the role of scarcity in shaping Dalit food culture. Many of the food practices described by Patole developed because of poverty and the limited availability of resources. Shortages of water, fuel, grains, vegetables, and cooking utensils encouraged communities to adapt their cooking methods according to their circumstances. Rather than presenting these conditions as signs of weakness, Patole shows the creativity, practical knowledge, and resilience of the community. Their recipes represent generations of adaptation and survival under difficult social and economic conditions.

The study also finds that Dalit food culture has often been misunderstood and overlooked by mainstream society. It is commonly assumed that Dalit cuisine is limited to meat consumption, while its diversity and richness are rarely acknowledged. Patole challenges these assumptions by documenting a wide range of vegetarian and non-vegetarian dishes prepared according to seasonal availability, local resources, and economic conditions. His work highlights the richness and uniqueness of Dalit culinary traditions and establishes them as an important part of India's cultural heritage.

Through the concept of gastropolitics, this dissertation further explains that food is closely connected with power and social control. Decisions about what people eat, who prepares food, and which foods are considered acceptable are influenced by caste and social hierarchy. Dominant society often presents vegetarian food as morally superior while treating Dalit food practices as impure. Patole questions these beliefs and shows that such ideas are socially constructed rather than natural or universal.

The discussion of purity and pollution also supports this argument. The study shows that these ideas extend beyond religious beliefs and influence everyday social

relationships. Food becomes a means through which caste boundaries are maintained. Patole exposes the contradictions within this system by showing that the same communities whose labour was essential for society were treated as impure and denied dignity. This reveals how caste hierarchy was maintained through everyday practices related to food and labour.

The study also highlights the importance of intersectionality in understanding the experiences of Dalit women. Women in the Mahar and Mang communities carried the responsibility of cooking, household work, agricultural labour, and preserving traditional food practices despite facing caste and gender discrimination. Their everyday labour played an important role in preserving the community's cultural memory. Through observation and daily practice, they passed culinary knowledge from one generation to another, ensuring the continuity of their cultural traditions.

Finally, the analysis shows that Patole does not romanticize the lives of Dalit communities. Instead, he presents their everyday experiences with honesty and realism. Along with discrimination, poverty, and social exclusion, he also records their resilience, cultural practices, and strong sense of community. His work presents Dalit communities not merely as victims but as people who preserve their identity, dignity, and history through their everyday lives. In this way, *Dalit Kitchens of Marathwada* successfully transforms ordinary food practices into powerful narratives of cultural memory, identity, and resistance.

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