

Ad Hoc Group (Research Committee)

Food, Culture and Society

Food has various social uses and functions that it performs, apart from being a part of the process of consumption. Food is governed by several religious regulations and prohibitions or taboos. There are several inter linkages between food, ecology and material reality. The gendered nature of food, too, has been highlighted. Gender, class and food interact with each other to highlight different relationships with the society of different groups of people. Similarly, there is an intricate connection between food and modernity. Food is a very visible part of contemporary public life, especially in the Indian context. Be it the emergence of a host of new eating places offering diverse kinds of cuisines in India's growing cities, portrayals in media (advertisements, cookbooks, cooking shows, photographs, social media) or the rise of applications (grocery shopping, online ordering, calorie tracking, etc.) – food is everywhere. But at the same time, there are also issues of food security, hunger and nutrition. The relationship between food and health – which has always been important in the Indian context – has also re-emerged in public sphere debates. It has also been argued that globalization has played a critical role in food systems. The relationship between food and the process of globalization is a multi-faceted one which has gained much interest in recent years.

Keeping in mind these old and new developments, the aim of this particular research committee is to explore the relationship between food, culture and society, with a specific focus on India. In times like ours, where the boundaries between the 'traditional' and the 'modern,' the 'local' and the 'global,' the 'urban' and the 'rural' are getting blurred, a study of food can reveal the changes and continuities in socio-cultural practices in society. The study of food offers us a window into understanding the larger social and the relationship of food to the economy, polity, identity, culture, moral codes, and family. The objective of this research group is to unravel these connections.

Some of the questions that this research group will seek to engage with include:

- Role and functions of food
- Food and meaning-making

- Relationship between food and identity
- Relationship between social conditions, ecology and food habits
- Relationship between food and nutrition
- Processes of migration, displacement and relationship with food
- Intersections between food and technology
- Digitalisation of food

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