



Food as a Gendered Text: An Analysis from Visual Media

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Abstract :

‘Food’, as a term, substantiates itself to be one of the words, having many discourses that attract the attention of many researchers. Food as a literal meaning or as many other novel incarnations of the word, can be understood, explain, connote, analyse and discuss with many perspectives. One such variation of the term is food as a gendered site. In this particular study, an attempt is being made to understand how androcentric language is associated with food as a cultural text. The entire study of this paper is done from the lens of feminist discourse and Cultural Studies perspective. Some YouTube videos of Topsy Bartender, a food vlog, are being considered as the text for the present study. The paper focuses on how androcentric language is used by the select food vlog along with the visual representations.

Key words- *Androcentrism, Food blogs, Lad culture, Topsy Bartender, Hegemonic Masculinity*

Introduction :

“So long as you have food in your mouth, you have solved all questions for the time being.”

-Franz Kafka.

Food, as a term, is important as well as familiar to everyone in this world. Academically also the term ‘food’ registered many significant studies around the world. Likewise, the term food, its different forms, variations, incarnations bagged many different works which are too significant for the societies to a meaningful progress. One of such discussion on food is the association of the concept of gender with it. In this context, the present study intends to refer to the term food porn which is already made a

significant position in the social as well as in the academic fields. In the social media platforms such as *facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest, Twitter*, and others, #Food porn is on hype from the recent past. A brief analysis is being discussed in this paper to know the term and the concept associated with it.

Food as a Gendered Site: Using the Lens of Food porn

Food porn is a concept, which in a way revolutionized the idea of food, to understand how food is being used to sexualize and to make human bodies as market ready. Some popular definitions given by different scholars would help in realizing the nature of the term in brief.



Scholars like Ibrahim (2) who opined that the term Food porn is something that presented in a glamorized visual by stylizing in different ways and the camera lens make the work more presentable with the editing skills seduce the gaze of the viewers through digital platforms. Another group of scholars like Michael Jacobson, Probyn and many others, commented that food porn is something that refers to the food that is unhealthy. Again in the same light, the Dejmanee (429), has said that the suffice 'porn' is used in food porn to indicate the aesthetic of excess but not anyway associated with sexual porn. Again in the contrary to it Bourdain, said a different narrative, Food porn, the glorification of food as a substitute for sex. Thus, it can be said that food porn is something where food is presented in a glamorous way to seduce the viewers. The viewers' responses towards the presentation of glamourized food by gazing are carnal in nature. So, food porn is something which can be constructed by associating different meanings in it and as time passes the term food porn is also growing with novel associations. For instance, during the time of Covid-19 many novel meanings have been entered to the arena of food porn. Having said this, it has been tried to make a point that through this study, the concept is basically used to see how it carries an androcentric language. Thus the basic objective of this paper is to examine how food as a cultural text is a gendered site. The paper intends to look at how female body is represented through the concept of food porn, in general and in the select food blog, in particular.

To understand the available language of food porn some literatures have been discussed in this section. In the work of Erin Metz McDonnell

(257-262), it has been observed that he looks food porn from all the possible perspectives, such as food porn showcase as carnal pleasures as well as food art, very beautifully. In the particular part where McDonnell explains vividly the carnal pleasures employed in food porn, with the help of various videography techniques such as Zoom, frame, Orientation, Depth of the field where the essence of androcentric language is being seen.

Again, Ibrahim (1-12) discusses food porn as something food porn provides a space for democratizing desires for all but in this way of looking another question arise like democratic to what extend as most of the people in the countries like India are in hungry state lacking food to eat. So, this can be understood as language of the capitalist. Like this many works can be found where androcentric language can be found in the arena of food porn. Thus, for this paper to study food porn language following aims and objectives are being trying to address.

Aims and objectives :

- 1) To understand the androcentric language of food blogs.
- 2) To examine how female subjectivity is constructed through the establishment of such androcentric language used in food blogs.

Methods and Methodology :

As already discussed in the abstract itself, it would be a textual analysis and the text is the *YouTube* videos uploaded by the food vlog named *Tipsy Bartender*. The reason of selecting the videos of *Tipsy Bartender* as text is because in the videos, everything i.e. the foods, drinks along with the persons in the videos are presented in a glamorous way. Moreover, as the video's name



suggests 'tipsy' which means slight drunk generally implies to a girl and the act of drinking which is generally considered as 'men's space'. Therefore, as discussed by Berke (36-45), in an article that alcohol-related aggression has association with the traditional masculine gender norms.

To understand the androcentric language in the text, the concept of Lad Culture is being employed in this discussion. From the concept of Lad Culture the idea of Ladette and Homosociality is being discussed with importance.

Knowing the text: *Tipsy Bartender* :

Tipsy Bartender is an online video food Blog which features exotic drinks which is hosted by Skyy John with one other co-host in each episode. Skyy John, who is born in Nassau Bahamas, later moved to America, where he started his blogging business. John uploads his videos of *Tipsy Bartender* food vlogs videos in Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram. He prepares different drinks according to his ideas and sometimes he takes the requests from his audience too. He shoots his videos singly and sometimes with his co-host, which generally includes female host. Male hosts are also the part of the show. The main concern in selecting the particular blog is to observe and analyse the host John Skyy and his different co-hosts' behaviour, attitude, use of language, approach. It is interesting to mention here that the entire atmosphere carries an androcentric representation which creates food as a site gendered space.

Lad Culture as the Icon of Androcentric Language :

Lad Culture is a British subculture which was initially associated with the British pop

movement. Lad Culture mostly signifies to the attitudes of middle and working class groups which believe in an anti-intellectual position and avoid sensitivity towards sexism, drinking, violence (Nelson pp.19-20). Nylund (9) in his works on Lad Culture very vividly explains lad Culture and basically, who is a lad. According to him, in 1990s "new lad" was an attempt to reassert hegemonic masculinity which has been felt lost by the concessions made to feminism. So, new kinds of masculinity arise. Though the idea of new lad is little bit old now, but for the present time, it can be seen in the magazines such as Maxim, FHM, and Loaded, and marked by a return to hegemonic masculine values of sexism, male, homophobia and homosociality. Moreover, the new lad or the lad culture include the nature like invest less time in work, drink, party, and watch sports; most importantly addressed and regard women as sexual objects.

Another interesting thing is that in lad culture women are treated as mere sexual objects but like the lads women also show some characteristics of lad culture and the female lad culture followers are called 'Ladette'. In an article it is mentioned very clearly that who are Ladettes, in the following way by ("BBC NEWS"), "ladettes refer to the group of young women who behave in boisterous way and engage in heavy drinking sessions. The entering of the term Ladettes into

dictionary its being quite a time though its uses is very less as compared to its male version of the word i.e. 'Lad'".

***Tipsy Bartender* as an Icon of Lad Culture :**

Tipsy Bartender, the title of the blog itself suggests a category which belongs to the Lad



Culture and Skyy John himself a New Lad. Topsy, the literal meaning is “Slightly drunk” and Bartender is one who serves drinks in a bar. The Lad Culture which holds the ideas like anti-intellectual, non-sensitive towards sexism, violence and favouritism towards drinking (qtd. in Nelson 19-20). So, the title itself propagates the idea of drinking and asks to remain slightly drunk often and the food blogs itself deals with different types of drinks.

Food porn in Topsy Bartender: A Feminist Reading :

Topsy Bartender, like any other Food vlogs, does its own kind of Food Porn through its own creative ideas.

An Analysis of The videos of *Topsy bartender The Skull Eyeball Cocktail*

The video *The Skull Eyeball Cocktail* was published on youtube. In this video as uploaded by *Topsy Bartender* (“Topsy Bartender”) the co-host is again Nikki Limo who dressed up like a Unicorn. The image of the Unicorn in the video signifies connotations. In the popular culture, Unicorn is a creature who is very strong with magical powers, a combination of both feminine and masculine powers, this creature cannot be tamed by a man but a virgin, pure beautiful woman with her attractiveness can only tame the creature. This creature is very important for men, as men can gain his magical masculine powers from the creature, so, in some fantasy stories, virgin females are used to tame the creature (“Huffpost”)

In this video, Nikki Limo acts like a unicorn represents a mere enjoyable object only. Skyy John addresses Nikki Limo as “My twerking Unicorn. Go ahead unicorn, ohhhh!” (“Topsy

Bartender”). It is significant to observe how female subjectivity becomes a commodity along with the entire process of the preparation of alcohol. In reference to this idea is one thing can be said that the use of female bodies as sexual objects is not only done in the gaze of males but the women themselves present their identities as provocative bodies for the market.

Another prominent element of the videos of *Topsy Bartender* is the focus of camera lens on the hands of female hosts. Hand attractiveness an important role where faces does not have much roles. Some videos of *Topsy Bartender* that are uploaded in Instagram attract the attention of hands, particularly female hands. Every angle of the female’s body is first being glamorized then it sells with profitable price and hence the status quo is maintained.

The sexualisation of feminine hands is one of the main issues of the discussion. Our society is composed of different types of taboos regarding the sexual activity among human beings in different types of societies, but one thing is common that is “the obscene” or “the Sexual activity” is always guided by some taboos. So, these taboos lead the human beings’ unconscious mind a storehouse of a large amount of desired painful unfulfilled obscene. These desired painful unfulfilled obscene are shaped by various different factors, but here mainly concerned with two main factors—Patriarchal society and Capitalist system, which are the main driving force of today’s scenario.

The first thing is due to the fact that our society is ruled or dominated by patriarchal norms and the capitalist system (the profit earning system) our collective unconscious is shaped by these two



forces. The patriarchal system shapes our society to an androcentric structure, which always treats and internalizes its subjects (the humans) the non-males (women, transgender) as objects to earn pleasure out of it and they are the second class citizens to the society. Moreover, heterosexuality is considered to be the societal norm. Ultimately the combination of the taboos (which resulted in the repressed sexual desires in the unconscious) and the patriarchal-capitalist society outbursts the result in constructing female subjectivity by objectifying female body parts, as mentioned above, the Hand attractiveness. The direct access to female body is a taboo in the public. Thus some accessible female body parts are being represented as a whole and we can see how female body is commodified as erotic objects by the capitalist market. Employing Jung 's idea, individuals are the smallest unit of Collective unconscious, the individuals learned the collective taboo on sexuality, that it should suppressed in public and at the same time, there are some ways which are sexual in nature but not taboo. The episode of playing with hand attractiveness is one the many ways to satisfy the suppressed instincts which are sexual in nature. ("Collective Unconscious")

Hand attractiveness has different types of forms like manicure, polishing the nails, wearing rings, bracelets, nail art, the shape of the hands etc. Nail Polish and other hand art act as the most important element in human attractiveness, in the case of both masculine and feminine beauty, though feminine beauty has more association with hand attractiveness and nail art kind of concept. It is not only in recent times, rather from the ancient

world, different forms of nail art play an important role in regard to human beauty especially the feminine beauty. artificial nail polish colour is a modern time's invention, but the nail colouring art is not new. The class and status in the society can easily be understood by the nail colour shade, the lower class use lighter shades and the upper class use the brighter shade. Slowly and gradually as time passes nail colouring art advent as one of the most popular cosmetic items.

Nailgasm :

Basically, this part of the paper can be regarded as related to 'Nailgasm'. It is important to discuss what the term 'Nailgasm' means. Literally, Nailgasm (n.) means 1) The physical and emotional sensation experienced at the peak of excitement from the artistic treatment of nails, 2) Intense or unrestrained excitement resulting from the visual stimulation of such art, 3) A Global nail art obsession resulting in the uprising of innovative nail artists and nail savvy entrepreneurs worldwide ("Who Is Brass").

In most of the food blog videos whether in Instagram or YouTube by John Skyy, always tries to sexify the nails and nail arts of the females, which is also an important element of seducing with the drinks. In most of the videos the nail polish colour of the female co-host is match up with the background colour of the videos, so it can be a connotation of that the hands are also the part of the food i.e. the drinks. The sexification of the hands and internalizing the view of sexiness is nothing but the appropriating the male gaze as discussed by Laura Mulvey (395) in her essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema". As mentioned by Mulvey, both men as well as women



gaze the object of desire (here the female hands) from a heterosexual androcentric male

perspective. It is quite interesting that how male gaze is associated with the term nailgasm which of course is the combination of the two terms—nail and gaze.

Conclusion :

Carol J. Adams, in her book *Sexual Politics of Meat* (21-22) popularized the concept of Absent Referent as “Metaphorically, the absent referent can be anything whose original meaning is undercut as it is absorbed into a different hierarchy of meaning. The absent referent is both there and not there” for instance, when we utter the word “meat”, the actual meaning is undercut i.e. the animal from which the meat is derived as the animal is already dead, so, the meaning and the animal is absent but new meaning is born the “meat” – a form of food, origination is unknown,

it seems to fall from the sky (Adams 2015). The same story is also for the females and her body which is absent in our society, as it is only treated as an object (the object of pleasure). Appropriating this concept of absent referent in this context of the Tippy bartender; in the videos of Tippy bartender the female as subjective being is not there rather a companion to drinks’ is being showcased. To conclude it can be said that to understand the social, political, economic aspects of our society, it is important to know the existence and operation of the concept of food porn. It is very interesting that how food as a cultural text carries many connotations that can help us understanding the androcentric layers of social structures. Such cultural text can also help us knowing how female subjectivity is constructed in a society which is patriarchal in nature.

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