



# NOUVELLE CUISINE AND THE CULINARY DELIGHT; A GLANCE INTO DARK DINING AND DEAF AND MUTE FRIENDLY DINING

**Sam Thomas K X**

*Assistant Professor, The Postgraduate Department of English, St. Paul's College, Kalamassery*

The culinary experience of this new epoch is altogether mesmerising and eye opening. Relishing Italian food in an Indian restaurant and Indian delicacies in a Canadian eatery have become indisputably common. While owners of food courts are waging a battle to bring home the bacon, a few exceptional ones are setting an example to the food culture of the modern times. In an era where one feeds their phones before their tummies, food served in some unique restaurants have a different narrative to share.

Food has become the prime ingredient of optimism in the lives of the blind, the deaf and mute and the incarcerated. Albeit being cut off from the society, a few eateries and its owners are in a rush to uplift the disabled community through food. It has been rightly stated that “The emotions that come from sharing food are universal. Food connects every human from the stomach, and it conquers all, from language barriers to cultural differences” (Birtles). Additionally, food also connects communities. It offers a space to apprehend and acknowledge the blessings that one simply takes advantage of. The paper aims to apprehend the modern-day culinary experiences and to study in detail the inclusion of all the members of the society into the current food culture.

In an era where umpteen restaurants and dining houses are being established on a daily basis, a few eateries have significantly given attention to the communities that remain ignored in the popular food culture. One among the few is the novel concept of dark dining. Dark dining restaurants have popped up globally, offering a different gastronomical experience to the customers who are served food in complete darkness. While removing vision from their culinary experience, the initiators of this concept have born in mind the everyday adventures in the lives of the blind. On one hand, dark dining is an eye-opening experience to the blindfolded diners and on the other hand, an opportunity for the blind to become employed as waiters serving food. Through the concept of dark dining, food became the sole ingredient that helped to understand the experience of the blind.

Candle light dinners are preferred by romantic diners who wish to spend a date with their beloved. But what if the dining room is pitch black or completely dark? What if food can help one to step into the shoes of the other? What if food can unite communities? What if the food served on the table is relished blindfolded? These questions seem to be triggering as

one may wonder how a person can savour the food on the table without apprehending it visually. When the vision is off, people tend to sharpen their other senses, thereby gaining a little understanding on the life of the blind. An insight into the culinary experience of the people who are blind help shed light on their table experiences. “Once in a while, it’s good to move out of your comfort zone. Dark dining allows you to do so, but it has a lot more to offer. It makes you appreciate the sense of sight, which so many in this world take for granted” (*Dark Dining Projects*). Dark Dining restaurants originated in Paris and was initiated by Michel Reilhac. With the establishment of *Blindekuh* in the year 1999, the concept of dark dining spread to various parts of Europe, North America and Asia.

India is now in the spotlight for introducing such concepts in its dining culture. Meal houses in India are also embracing the modern-day food culture and dark dining restaurants are not alien to its people. Hyderabad, Delhi, Chennai and Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh have widened their dining experience by opening up dark dining restaurants which help understand sensory deprivation and its impact on the everyday lives of the blind. A diner who goes in to a dark dining restaurant to relish his food, comes out with an immense relief of not being deprived of sight. As Kawai has remarked after her dark dining experience:

I cannot imagine my life without my sight and yet some individuals who lost their sight have to deal with it every day and have the mental strength to continue on. These are not people we generally term as brave, but rather the unfortunate, disabled or handicapped. We usually show sympathy instead of admiration for their strength—but I think we can change our perspective on that. (*Delishably*)

Another significant restaurant idea that took birth in Toronto has uplifted culinary experience to an educational level. *Signs* restaurant in Toronto offers a new dimension for learning the American Sign Language as the customers entering this restaurant interact with deaf waiters. Just like dark dining, deaf and mute friendly dining also opens new platforms to the physically disabled people. It not just offers diners a space to apprehend the culinary habits of people who are deprived of a sensory experience but also provides them employment opportunities. The waiters in these restaurants are deaf or mute



and this could be categorised as a strategy to bring them forward.

Similar to the dark dining restaurants, there are several cafes and eateries that have opened up in Indian cities like Mumbai, Bangalore, Pune and Delhi that are deaf and mute friendly. The waiters here are deaf and mute and the eatery is a space for them to interact and serve the outer world. As it is remarked, "Flashcards, sign languages at the entrance and customer-friendly ways to communicate with the staff truly bring together a unique dining experience and some food for thought!" (Pandey).

Apart from the aforementioned, restaurants of the present era are also uplifting jail inmates by including them in the food making and serving process. Restaurant ideas like dining behind bars or 'kaidi kitchen' give customers an experience of the life of inmates confined to a jail and their culinary experience. Food culture today has taken a positive shape by being inclusive and friendly to the different sections of the society. The restaurants that are coming up in the modern times are embracing new concepts that are beneficial to all the communities. Meals houses of the present era provide a space for sharing food, experience and thoughts.

## WORKS CITED

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