

INDIA SWEDEN FOOD TALK

14 June 2022

Remarks

Ambassador Tanmaya Lal

Good morning,

Thank you Mr. Sanjoo Malhotra for putting together a very interesting panel of experts.

Food is a **fascinating subject**. It has importance in our **daily lives**, it is part of our **cultures** and has significance for national **economies** and even **global trading networks**.

It is important both for the **health of individuals and the planet**.

We can see that food has been an integral part of the **journey of human civilization**.

This interesting panel of experts will be able to look at some of these varied aspects relating to food, cuisines, societies and economies.

With a **fast-growing Indian professionals** and companies in Sweden and the increasing number of Swedish businesses in India, mutual understanding including about food is expanding.

New flavours are emerging.

In India **IKEA** is offering **vegetarian or chicken balls with Indian curry** ! Here in Sweden we have started offering **Indian style toast skagen** at India House with the help of our friends at Indian Street Food !

In most big cities, for instance in Stockholm or Mumbai, one can sample **cuisine from across the world**. These flavours often also **evolve** to cater to palates in their new settings.

Research is also revealing the various **influences** from near and far that go into cuisine of any region.

There has been a fantastic **journey** of food starting from the local **hunter gatherers** and foragers to **farming** that became the basis for urban settlements, to **trade**, to **franchises**, to now **lab grown foods** and other innovations by **startups**.

Today there is an explosion of content relating to **recipes and diet plans on social media**.

But going a little deeper, one can look at Food at various levels.

Food evokes **memories**. Of times spent with families or friends, of traditions and festivals or feasts on marriages or other special occasions.

Food tells **stories**. Of decades or centuries, even millennia. They tell stories of migrations, of trade, of conquest, of kingdoms. They remember past versions of globalisation.

Spices have been traded for millennia and formed the basis for the global trading networks that transformed into **colonial and plantation economy** models in recent centuries to grow sugar, coffee or bananas, that relied on exploitation of **slaves**.

At a very basic level, **Food cooked with fire**, of course, is one of the most fundamental of things that made us human.

Across geographies humans learnt to prepare food by grilling over **fire**, cooking in **liquid** in pots, **baking** bread **with** air and **fermenting** cheese or beer.

If we start at a very **macro level**, we see how in an interconnected world today **food supplies, prices and security** are interlinked.

Turbulence and **conflict** in one region can disrupt supplies globally. This is also linked to fuel and fertilizers availability and prices.

We can talk about what can be done to feed the growing human **population that has doubled** in the last five decades.

In India the **scientific green revolution** in 1960s realized food security for such a large proportion of global population. Today India is a major food **exporter**.

We can see how **malnutrition** and **obesity** coexist paradoxically in our world.

Another issue is how **food and seed production can be concentrated** in a few companies globally.

Yet another sensitive and often contested issue is of huge **global agricultural subsidies** especially in developed economies.

At a more **micro level**, we can look at the fascinating **diversity of cuisines** within and among countries that vary according to **soils, climates and availability** of plants and other ingredients.

Sometimes foods or recipes that most people feel are very native or authentic may actually have **evolved** very recently. For instance, the use of potatoes or tomatoes in India which we now take for granted, came only a couple of hundred years ago.

There continue to be **innovations** in the food industry.

Modern techniques of food preservation and packaging, sometimes developed for soldiers and even space farers have helped the development of modern food industry.

Fast food chains is another innovation that spread all over the world during the last few decades, even leading to the formulation of the **BigMac index** by the influential Economist magazine as a way to compare currencies.

Today, produce from all over the world is available, especially in developed markets leading to concerns whether this is **sustainable** in the impact on water availability or environment through carbon emissions.

Indigenous or **traditional knowledge** is based on generations of trial and error. I remember the story of The Three Sisters - **corn, bean and squash** - who have been grown for millennia by indigenous communities in the Americas; how they complement each other, nourish the soil, make for a balanced meal and have been the sustainable polyculture farming solution.

We are seeing a return to a premium for local produce and **organic** farming. In India all farmland in the state of Sikkim has become 100% organic.

There is also a realization of the benefits of traditional cereals such as **millets**. At the initiative of the Indian government, FAO and the United Nations have designated the next year 2023 as the **International Year of Millets** to raise global awareness of their nutritional value and importance for food security and combating climate change as they are tolerant to harsh growing conditions.

Much of our **traditional practices of farming or consumption and lifestyles** were inherently **sustainable**.

The **young generation** today is increasingly aware of the **impact** of industrial farming or meat production on **soils, water or carbon emissions**. There is **growing consumer acceptance** for more sustainable solutions. They are also increasingly moving to more **vegetarian** options, where Indian cuisine has a lot of choices.

Today, latest developments in digital services transformation and logistics improvements are driving many innovations, including in small towns.

We are witnessing interesting new **startup trends** in terms of plant-based food, precision fermentation, special proteins, use of seaweed, algae and fungi, cloud kitchens, non-alcoholic drinks, personalised nutrition, lab-grown 'meat' and D2C solutions.

All these offer huge opportunities for possible **collaborations** between businesses and entrepreneurs from India and Sweden.

I look forward to listening to all the experts to find out more about current trends and collaborations.

Best wishes

Thank You.
