

4th PANDIT DEENDAYAL UPADHYAY MEMORIAL INTERNATIONAL ORATION

21 May 2021 :: Indian Council for Cultural Relations, Azad Bhawan, Delhi

“Insights into India’s Culinary Traditions”

CONCEPT NOTE

THE BACKGROUND

The Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay Memorial International Oration, presented annually by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) since 21 May 2018 (World Culture Day), has become a globally recognised forum for India to showcase her soft power to the world. ‘India’s Soft Power and Its Importance in Diplomacy’, significantly, was the subject of the first oration delivered by the late External Affairs Minister of India, Smt. Sushma Swaraj.

In this seminal address, delivered in her inimitable style, Smt. Swaraj emphasised how India’s rich and varied cuisine had become the country’s new soft power, winning hearts of people around the world. She narrated the story of a visiting foreign minister, who said he loved “Indian halwa”. She recalled how she had struck a personal bond with the visiting South African foreign minister by serving her *naan* and *dal* at the 8th BRICS Summit in Goa in 2018. “Whenever I ask foreign guests, ‘Do you like Indian food?’, they say we love it,” Smt. Swaraj said, and added: “*Itni badhi taakat hai Bharatiya vyanjan ki* (Such is the power of Indian food).”

It is this theme that we wish to develop during the fourth oration. The subject, stated above, will fit in seamlessly with the themes of the previous two orations:

2019: ‘Sanskrit: An Instrument for the Promotion of India’s Soft Power’ by Justice (Retd.) R.M. Lahoti, former Chief Justice of India.

2020: ‘Ayurveda and Its Relevance Today’ by Anotnio Morandi, President of the Italian Scientific Society for Ayurvedic Medicine.

Our ancient Sanskrit texts, from the *Rig Veda* and the *Satapatha Brahmana* to the Upanishads have hymns singing paeans to the divine power of food (for instance, the ‘Food of Eternal Life’ in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*). The Upanishads equate Brahman – the divine power driving all actions in the universe – with food, making it central to life and living. The *Bhagavad Gita* even lays down the principles of good eating, stressing the benefits of *sattvic* food.

Food is central also to Ayurveda. *Charaka Samhita*, the core text of this ancient science, views healthy, nutritious food with medicine, emphasising it is as much an ingredient of a disease-free life as mental well-being. Modern medicine couldn’t agree more. Mahatma Gandhi understood this linkage and therefore wrote extensively on diet management and a healthy lifestyle in his

journals – *Indian Opinion*, *Young India* and *Harijan*. Increasingly, the world is looking up to the ‘ayurvedic lifestyle’ as the panacea to the burden of lifestyle diseases.

THE CASE FOR CULINARY DIPLOMACY

India has a centuries-old food culture with a lot to offer to the world – not only diverse ingredients and flavours, but also a deep knowledge of foods that heal.

The world is no longer a stranger to Indian food – it has, in fact, gone beyond *naan* and *vindaloo* to discover the vast variety that the Indian table has to offer. Enlightened chefs in the western world have become vocal proponents of the principles of seasonality and local sourcing – eat only what is seasonal and grows near you. We have known this all along.

The world has also woken up to the immense healing power – both for the people and the planet – of a vegetarian (or vegan) lifestyle, which has evolved over centuries in India. Animal protein-based diets today have been implicated in the greenhouse gas overload responsible for climate change. India has the wisdom to contribute meaningfully to the global discussion on the impact of industrial meat production on our overloaded planet.

CULINARY DIPLOMACY : NATIONAL OBJECTIVES

In the light of this introductory discussion, the Fourth Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay Memorial International Oration will be focused on the salience of a push for culinary diplomacy under the leadership of the ICCR and a discussion on the actionable objectives of this national effort. We propose the following objectives:

- (1) Promote India’s agricultural biodiversity and her ayurvedic diet by setting apart a week every year – on the lines of the International Yoga Day – dedicated to a celebration of Indian Gastronomy by our diplomatic missions around the world.
- (2) Set in motion the process of certification of ‘Indian’ restaurants around the world as authentic purveyors of our cuisine.
- (3) Campaign internationally for the inclusion of elements on Indian Cuisine in UNESCO’s Intangible Heritage List.
- (4) Lobby with Michelin to launch an India Guide, which, as seen most recently, has done a world of good to tourism in Thailand and Taiwan. A Michelin Guide dramatically enhances the visibility of and the level of worldwide interest in the dining traditions and restaurants of the host country.