EATING OUT AND FOOD WASTE IN BANGALORE

INTERVIEW WITH SUNAYANA GANGULY
Researcher in Bangalore

1. **Can you describe the eating out scene in Bangalore and how it has changed over the past years?**

Bangalore has seen rapid transformation with the expansion of the information technology (IT) sector in the decade of 1991-2001. This rapid expansion was a result of migration of a labour pool of highly skilled, English-speaking young urban professionals who found an expanding sector of employment. Coming in from different parts of the country, they brought with them different languages, cuisines and a distinct global outlook that came from being part of a globally integrated sector. Given that most of the new migrants were young with high disposable incomes, the city suddenly had an influx of new restaurants catering to diverse tastes which ranged from street food, traditional eateries and fine dining. Food became a space where the traditional and international met and 'glocalistion' became evident in the way foreign dishes were made more accessible and attractive to the Indian palate through the adaptation of recipes to local tastes with the use of certain spices, such as the chicken *tikka* pizza or the Maharaja Mac.

2. **Do people eat out as a form of status-seeking?**

Through our research, we found that the notion of status needs to be nuanced. It is too reductive to think of an individual identity in India as solely about status when it is nested in other markers, such as community, religion and class. What is clear is that eating out has many associated meanings. On one hand, people often eat at restaurants that serve traditional food from their community, associated with familiarity. On the other hand, eating out is also associated with novelty and adventure. We found that this functions at two levels: firstly, people eat out to try new cuisines from different communities, within India, stepping outside their own distinct food conventions. This means that a Tamilian (South Indian) family would be more likely to eat Punjabi (North Indian) food while eating out. Secondly, for the emerging globalized IT workforce in India, eating out is also a demonstration of disposable income and distinction in taste.

3. **How is eating out different from eating at home?**

The qualitative interviews in Bangalore around food consumption practices revealed two distinct spaces of consumption: the home and the world: by which we mean dining out for leisure, workplaces and schools. This operates in two dimensions –everyday cooking at home and eating out. In India, routinized cooking practices or rather "what is cooked everyday" at home largely expresses community membership and people tend to follow recipes and cuisines that have been passed down to them from their families and regions. The search for novelty and expression of class finds its place rather in the public space of

eating out. This has the twin expression on demonstrating an individual or family's disposable income as well as distinction in taste by demonstrating food consumption practices linked to global lifestyle. Our interviews revealed that going out to eat does not simply reflect trendy global cuisines, but also allows people to step out of the community distinctions of what was prepared at home. Thus eating out is also a chance to sample the culinary diversity of cuisines within India and the world that they would otherwise have limited access to. For some families, it was also outside the home that they consumed non vegetarian food and therefore it released them from the constraints of caste that dominated the home.

4. What role can restaurants play in reducing food waste?

Restaurants have an important role to play in food waste generation and could follow three principles to reduce food waste – reduce, reuse and recycle. Some formats of serving food like the buffet are more conducive to food waste, while over-ordering *a la carte* can be managed by encouraging people to pack up left over food. Restaurants talk about the many processes that they try to put in place while dealing with massive quantities of food waste, whether it is better managing their inventories and planning menus, re-using leftover waste for piggeries or turning wet waste into biogas that can be used to power their kitchens. Restaurants also have a role to play in letting the customer know when they are over-ordering and gently guiding a customer to order the right quantities.

5. What about consumers, what role do people play in waste management?

Our research found that most people do not like to waste food and that current food consumption practices in Bangalore do not seem to generate much wastage. Especially at the household level, very little organic waste is generated. However, a consumer is far more likely to waste food at a restaurant, often because of over-ordering. Consumers can do their bit in reducing the amounts that are ordered or packing up what is left over. At a household or building level, in terms of waste management and recycling, for the moment it is merely a matter of complying with the laws stipulating that people must segregate their waste. People can and have organised at a building or neighbourhood level to train household help to segregate waste properly and apply peer pressure to people who do not comply. Waste warriors have also empowered marginalised rag pickers, the ones most familiar with waste, giving them the proper tools and capital to do their jobs effectively and with dignity. While awareness helps when it comes to reducing and recycling waste, food consumption and related waste is tied to many other practices – responsibility cannot be placed at the individual level alone.