

# An Exploration of Gendered Food Bias in Central Rural North Indian Homes

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By: Nishita Chandra

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## **Attestation of Authorship**

I, Nishita Chandra, hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the Acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or another institution of higher learning.

Signed:  \_\_\_\_\_

Nishita Chandra

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Last but not the least, this study is dedicated to my maternal grandmother, whose life experiences and struggles are what motivated me to look at the Indian society through a magnifying glass, hoping to better the lives of women around the country.

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## **Abstract**

The North Indian society is deeply patriarchal and as a result, the women often suffer. The cultural and societal expectations of women burden their health and well-being throughout their lives, affecting various parts of their lives including their relationship with food. Previous studies have focused on and identified the nutritional discrepancies between men and women and the nutritional effects of a food bias, but have not ventured into a socio-cultural aspects that further the nutritional bias. This study aims to explore the underlying reasons and mechanisms behind a gendered food bias within rural North Indian society.

Secondary data were collected through Indian YouTube channels portraying the real lives of the people in rural North India between 2015 and 2019. According to the findings, family hierarchy, roles of service for women, and traditional norms of behaviour were overarching themes that promote a gendered food bias in rural North Indian society. The supporting mechanisms are how food is prepared, served and consumed, as within the rural food cycle, these activities show a visible bias in favour of men.

This study provided insights and practical and theoretical implications such as explaining the mechanisms that preserve the food bias against women in North Indian society, and recommends initiatives from government bodies in these areas that would help educate people to make them aware of the existent bias and how it affects women and girls.

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

As a culture, India is a patriarchal society with a gender bias as an inherent characteristic within it. The society is stratified by rigid gender roles that define and shape the lives of people. Until 2017, the country ranked 141st out of 142 nations in the world that were categorised as gender critical in terms of health and survival of women (Kohli, 2017). The North Indian region comprising of four states, Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand is affected by deeply rooted ideas of patriarchy, the superiority of men, and the subordination of women (Dutt, 2018). Women in North India have limited freedom to make decisions about their lives and have less autonomy than men (Jejeebhoy & Sathar, 2001). A woman's role as subordinate is deemed important and a tradition that needs to be upheld (Dutt, 2018). The family structure within this region is characterised by patrilineal descent and excludes women (Jejeebhoy & Sathar, 2001). The preference for sons stems from the belief that sons uphold and maintain the male lineage, attend to aging parents, and perform the father's funeral rites (Ghosh, 2004).

These socio-cultural factors cause a bias against women in many ways, food being one of them. When the resources within a household are limited, they are given to the male members of the family instead of the girls and women (Kapur, 2019). Families often ensure the consumption of food by the male members by overlooking the needs of the women and girls during food shortages, making sure the male members are well fed (Ramachandran, 2006). One of the main reasons for such a bias can be the prospect that the male members are the future providers, and hence are allotted more food than the women (Fledderjohann et al., 2014). Boys have an advantage in receiving better quality and quantities of food from an early age, with protein rich foods such as eggs, legumes, root vegetables and fresh fruit, along with meat and milk (Aurino, 2016).

This bias impacts women in many ways, malnutrition being one of them. Malnutrition rates among women in India are extremely high and the women who belong to economically disadvantaged social groups suffer the most (Jose & Navaneetham, 2008). Studies show that a total of 22.4% of Indian women were underweight and around 51.6% had anaemia in the years 2011-2016 (Bharti et al., 2019). Even though this is a persistent issue, the analysis in this study focuses on nutrition; however, a deeper look into the socio-cultural mechanisms will also help identify the root causes of malnutrition.



## **1.2 RESEARCH AIMS AND QUESTIONS**

This study aims to explore the gendered food bias within a central rural North Indian household. The two research questions are as follows:

1. What are the underlying reasons behind the bias in food distribution among genders in central North Indian rural homes?
2. What are the mechanisms that perpetuate this bias?

To answer these questions, certain key aspects such as the local cultural background of the region, the societal structure, the family structure and the relationship of gender were examined. The main objective of this research is to understand why there is a food bias against women in the domestic environment and what enables this bias. The value of the research lies in the insights into the socio-cultural structures that perpetuate bias and the possibilities for positive change that may arise from these insights. An assessment of the reasons for a gendered food bias may help understand the situation and its root causes, beginning a conversation about this topic as well as helping eradicate this issue.

## **1.3 METHODS AND METHODOLOGY**

This research was conducted using a qualitative feminist methodology. This approach is appropriate, as the feminist perspective works from the assumption that women's disadvantage is a consequence of their societal position as women (Kumra, Simpson & Burke, 2014). A qualitative approach can use visual observations and written words to express individuals' lived experience in different situations (Amaratunga, Baldry et al., 2002). This approach helped gain a deep perspective into the gendered nature of rural North Indian society. Secondary data were collected from YouTube channels and analysed using the six steps of thematic analysis set out by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis can be defined as a method used to analyse, identify and report patterns within data (Braun & Clarke 2006) and is often used in interpretive qualitative research.

## **1.4 RESEARCHER POSITIONING**

This topic was chosen because of a deeply personal reason; the choice was due to the life experiences of my maternal grandmother who suffered many adversities, unacknowledged gender bias being one of them. She was married at a young age and had nine children. In taking care of her family, relatives, children, friends and husband, she often did not have any time or food left for herself due to the financial situation of the household, or her own exhaustion. For many years of the latter part of her life she was

bed-ridden due to poor mental and physical health and went through a lot of pain and suffering. I was close to her and although I was young when she passed away, she has always stayed close to my heart. Now that I am engaged in postgraduate education in gastronomy, I understand the importance education has on our lives and this made me think of how the years of food deprivation may have manifested in my grandmother as grave physical and mental issues. I realise that this is an issue faced by many women in India where their health and well-being are often over-looked and they face the consequences later in life. My reasoning to choose the Central North Indian region for this research is that this region has been associated with recent media reports for their bias against women in the form of crimes, female infanticide, mistreatment of women and girls in their homes. Therefore, highlighting the issue within this area seemed like a good way to begin a conversation about a food bias among genders, as this is the region where it is reflected openly and on a large scale. My personal aim with this research is to have a conversation started about gender bias in order to help Indian women.

## **1.5 DISSERTATION STRUCTURE**

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the research background, aims and objectives, methodology and methods used to conduct the research, as well as the basic structure of the dissertation.

Chapter 2 explores the literature and knowledge available on gendered food bias in rural North India. It reviews important aspects related to food, gender and socio-cultural practices in India.

Chapter 3 explains in detail the feminist methodology used in the research. The data collection and analysis methods are also explained in this chapter.

Chapter 4 presents the findings from the qualitative approach and discusses the overlap between the findings and the literature in the research.

Chapter 5 summarises the research as well as its objectives and provides theoretical and practical implications along with the limitations of the research and some concluding remarks.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the literature on food and gender related socio-cultural aspects of the rural North Indian society. It gives an overview of the meanings and definitions around food bias and gender, explaining them within the global and local contexts. It looks into aspects of poverty, education, economic contribution, nutrition and socio-cultural norms and traditions in relation to food, gender and the North Indian society.

#### *2.1.1 Gender theory and food bias*

Gender can be defined as a socially constructed concept that is shaped by the behavioural cues and social codes of femininity and masculinity. Gender is performative; it is something one 'does' (Launius & Hassel, 2018). It can also be viewed as different conceptualisations of the meaning of gender, and as sexual differences, all of which vary across different cultures across the world (Stone & King, 2018). Gender can be viewed as a stylised mode of interaction which may indicate deference or dominance. This can be explored as the symbolic nature of gender that produces certain behaviours in day to day interactions (Desai & Andrist, 2010).

Food bias can be understood as an unfairness exhibited towards an individual or group of people in the allocation of food (Pradhan & Rao, 2018). According to this concept, gendered food bias is discrimination in the allocation of food to an individual because of their gender. Gendered food bias often manifests as malnutrition or under-nutrition, with lower survival rates for the most malnourished women, and is often studied in terms of food choice and nutrition (Cavazza, Guidetti & Butera, 2015). Malnutrition can be defined as a deficiency of a wide range of nutrients that results in measurable adverse effects on body composition and function (Saunders, Smith & Stroud, 2015). Malnutrition is often associated with poverty, social isolation and disease, and can affect muscle and bone strength, tissue repair, immunity and mental health (Saunders et al., 2015).

Globally, two out of three women suffer from chronic anaemia, malnutrition and fatigue (Gay, 2018). Although these issues have a variety of different reasons, inadequate access to socio-cultural tools and limited control over assets and resources may be a major reason for gender disadvantage (Gay, 2018). A failure to locate women's lived experiences within the context of gendered power relations, practices and social structures leaves the

socio-political context unchallenged, furthering bias in everyday situations such as the distribution and consumption of food (Woolhouse, Day, Rickett & Milnes, 2011).

### ***2.1.2 Food and gender in a global context***

Gender is a social construct and gender inequality is a by-product of societal views on gender. Gender inequality is deeply ingrained in many societies and regions around the world and can be looked on through a lens of the unequal treatment of men and women in society (Singh, 2019). Gender inequalities often manifest in different ways globally. They can be in the form of unequal access to resources, or discriminatory socio-cultural practices, and while these inequalities affect everyone, girls are more likely to be at a disadvantage (Kågesten, Gibbs et al., 2016). The root of many gender inequalities is entrenched gender norms that impose different power, status and opportunities to both genders in accordance with culturally appropriate versions of masculinities and femininities. Global data indicate that imposed gender norms are reflected in personal gender attitudes, especially among young people (Kågesten, Gibbs et al., 2016).

In China, male children are desired as they reflect the improved economic status of the family. A number of rural Chinese families only treat their sons as family members, while daughters are treated as temporary to eventually be “married off” and leave (Kong & Osberg, 2018). This makes it common for parents to allocate more resources towards sons, especially when resources become scarce (Kong & Osberg, 2018).

In many South African communities, food allocation depends on a number of attributes such as age, marital status, family status and gender (Dodson & Chiweza, 2012). In most cases, women’s food allocations are less than those of men at mealtimes, or they eat only leftovers. This can be due to cultural norms that value men and boys over women and girls, which affects food allocation in a household (Dodson & Chiweza, 2012).

In Bangladesh, nutritional discrimination against girls is evidenced by a 16% higher calorie consumption among boys compared to girls, especially under the age of five. This bias can be due to the lack of maternal empowerment or market opportunities for women in the country (Finaret et al., 2018). In Nepal, a gender bias affecting food allocation is more evident in Hindu communities than in Buddhist communities. In Hindu communities, the husband or man of the house has the power to make all decisions, including the allocation of resources such as food. In times of food scarcity, the women are at a significant disadvantage, and often eat leftover food, or nothing at all. In Buddhist

communities, there is an equal allocation of resources, irrespective of abundance or scarcity (Madjdian & Bras, 2016).

In the context of food, this gender inequality leads to food bias and scarcity for women. Although food constitutes the basic element of a functioning life, access to food is mediated through social and cultural hierarchies and identities (Pradhan & Rao, 2018).

### ***2.1.3 Food and gender in an Indian context***

India is greatly influenced by gender and gender roles, especially in relation to resources such as food. Indian society is largely patriarchal and gender bias is therefore an inherent characteristic. Patriarchy is a system of social practices and structures wherein men exploit, dominate and oppress women (Kohli, 2017). Until 2017, India ranked 141st out of 142 nations categorised as gender critical in terms of the health and survival of women. According to the global gender gap report 2015, designed by the World Economic Forum to measure global gender equality, India ranks 127th on the gender inequality index and has the 114th highest gender gap in the world (Kohli, 2017).

India is a multi-cultural society housing many different religions, although the majority of the population are followers of Hinduism. The term "Hindu" was initially used as a Persian term for all the people who lived beyond the Indus River. Towards the end of the 18th century, the British started referring to the people of Hindustan as Hindus (Flood, 1996), and the term came describe the religion of those from India who do not follow any of the major religions of the world (Flood, 1996). Hinduism constitutes the world's third largest religion and comprises over 80% of the population India (Kalra et al., 2015). Among Hindu families, daughters are raised only to fulfil the ultimate sacrifice to the god Indra through *kanyadaan* or the giving away of the daughter in marriage (Ghosh, 2004). Therefore, women and girls are deemed to be burdens that parents do not want to deal with. The male dominated society of India therefore makes the women habitual targets of discrimination (Kohli, 2017).

### ***Central North India***

This study is set in the central North Indian region comprising mostly of four states: Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. The central North Indian people are mostly Sikhs and Hindus as well as communities of Jains and Muslims (Jeffery, 2014). The region is rich in flora and fauna, with wetlands and high animal and bird diversity, making agriculture and farming an important activity for the people of the region (Sundar

& Kittur, 2013). Local politics play a powerful role in the culture and society of the region, with many social constructs and norms resulting in power plays and domination by affluent people of the lower classes. The northern part reflects Indian patriarchal norms and reinforces deeply rooted ideas about the superiority of men and the subordination of women (Dutt, 2018). Patriarchal societies typically have inegalitarian gender relations and the women of North India have relatively less autonomy and freedom than women in the rest of the country (Jejeebhoy & Sathar, 2001). A woman's subordinate role is looked on as a "cultural legacy" that needs to be upheld, giving men an inherent place of privilege in society (Dutt, 2018). Within this society, female foeticides and sex-selective abortions are practised widely in this region among urban and rural families (Jeffery, 2014).

The central North Indian family structure is strongly gender stratified and characterised by patrilineal descent, inheritance, and succession, all of which exclude women (Jejeebhoy & Sathar, 2001). In most North Indian families, sons are desired as they raise the prestige of the family by carrying on the family name (Bose, 2011). Similar to China, throughout this region, a girl is prepared for marriage and viewed in India as *paraya dhan* (someone else's property), and therefore a temporary resident in her parents' home. The legal marrying age for girls is 18 and for boys is 21, although in this region most girls are considered to be marriageable when they reach puberty, approximately between 10 and 12 years old (Bhagat, 2016). From her childhood, a girl is domesticated and "tamed" to become an acceptable bride who would fit in with her in-laws' ways (Jeffery, 2018). Girls are required to be undemanding and respectful about decisions made for them and are taught to cover their heads to signal respect for senior family members. In this region, a woman's compliance is considered an important aspect of her becoming a good wife and daughter-in-law (Jeffery, 2018).

The family system refers to the manner in which family processes unfold within a household (Madjdian & Bras, 2016). Families bargaining on the distribution of resources such as food are influenced by the culturally varying norms, values and practices that make up a family system. Within different family systems, family relations, norms, and practices influence people's lives in very distinctive ways (Madjdian & Bras, 2016).

The Indian family system is mostly patriarchal, which means the man is the head of the household. This system implies the natural superiority of men over women in a family, and perpetuates women's dependence on men (Sultana, 2011). Family size and structure has a direct relationship with food allocation and entitlement (Pradhan & Rao, 2018). The

basis of the Indian family structure is such that the husband or father is the authoritative figure of the household (Sultana, 2011). Most property and other important resources such as access to food sources and healthcare are controlled by men and passed on only to the male members of the family, usually from father to son (Sultana, 2010). Even when the women have a legal right to such assets, emotional pressures and at times violence, prevents them from gaining control over them, so in most cases women are disadvantaged (Sultana, 2010).

Because of male privilege, gender-based food bias against women is a persistent issue in many rural North Indian communities. Studies reflect the unequal allocation of goods and services among the genders that primarily affects women and girls (see, for example, Subramanian, 1991). Women are often overlooked or ignored in terms of the distribution of resources such as food in households, particularly for poorer families with less than average resources. In North India, gender inequality has its roots in the social and cultural stratification of roles and responsibilities that are assigned to men and women, and the unequal valuations of these roles (Gupta & Yesudian, 2006). Therefore, women's lack of empowerment is reflected in gender roles, gender identities, and relationships in households, communities and the wider society at large (Gupta & Yesudian, 2006).

### ***The matriarchal society of north-east India***

The word "matriarchy," is derived from the Greek word "archē" which means both "domination" and "beginning", although these meanings cannot be combined (Abendroth, 2018). As already outlined, the cultural norms and constructs of Indian society reinforce gender bias among men and women to different degrees and in different contexts. This has led to India's strong preference for the male child (Koli, 2017). It is common occurrence for the birth of a son to be celebrated, but the birth of a daughter is often ignored or goes unnoticed. This could be because it is believed that sons raise the prestige and power of a family, while a daughter is a liability (Bose, 2011). A significant exception is the North Eastern region, which is a matriarchal society composed of eight states: Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh (Abendroth, 2018). Matriarchies are gender-equal societies rather than female dominated. Even though women are at the centre of their communities, egalitarian principles govern the social functioning and freedoms of both sexes. In this part of the country, the mother is the official successor to the previous clan mother—her own mother. She is responsible for the distribution of the common wealth, making sure everyone gets an equal part, and according to the needs of each (Abendroth, 2018).

This social structure is significantly different from that of the rest of the country, where fathers are considered the head of the family. It also greatly affects the allocation of resources to family members, as all members irrespective of their gender, are given equal and adequate access to resources. While the north eastern states of India are an exception, in the northern states of India, gender bias is more conspicuous than in the south (Koli, 2017). Although these states rank highly in terms of their overall development, extreme discrimination against women is evident from female foeticide to bias in education and career, and even within homes, girls and women are discriminated against. In households, less resources are spent on girls than are on boys (Koli, 2017).

## **2.2 POVERTY AND GENDERED FOOD BIAS**

Economic poverty and gender inequality are interlinked, and women are more likely to live in poverty and suffer from economic insecurity than are men (Hughes, Bolis, Fries & Finigan, 2015). Gender inequality is a driver of poverty and its associated inequalities, and discrimination against women and girls is the most common consequence of inequality driven by poverty (Hughes et al., 2015). Between 1980 and 2016, India's top 10% of incomes captured 66% of growth, while the bottom 50% captured only 11%, and the disadvantaged social groups of lower caste Hindus represented 55% of the poor in 2011 (Page & Pande, 2018). There are cases of greater malnutrition of women and girls in poor households, with gender being the most significant cause (Ramachandran, 2007). Malnutrition is a state of poor nutrition that includes under-nutrition as well as over-nutrition (Bharati et al., 2019). Malnutrition is result of poor diet quality, poor health care, and certain behaviours that are shaped by underlying factors such as low economic development, political instability, and inequality (Bharati et al., 2019).

A study of malnutrition and anaemia among adult women in India showed that 22.4% of Indian women were underweight and around 51.6% suffered from anaemia in the years 2011 to 2016 (Bharti et al., 2019). The sample consisted of 651,642 non-pregnant women aged 15–49 years, and the World Health Organisation (WHO) classification was used to define nutritional status by body mass index (BMI) (kg/m<sup>2</sup>): underweight: less than 18.5, normal weight: between 18.5 and 24.9, overweight: between 25.0 and 29.9, obese: more than or equal to 30.0 (Bharti et al., 2019, p. 659). In comparison, a study on the prevalence and determinants of anaemia among adult males in a rural area of Haryana showed that around 22.7% of the males aged 15–49 years suffered from anaemia (Kant et al., 2019). This indicates a difference of 28.9% between the number of men and women suffering



from anaemia in India. Although this difference will be the result of various factors, food bias is likely to be a major factor.

Ramachandran (2006) stated that in the central North Indian state of Punjab, adult women consume approximately 1000 fewer calories than do men, with the normal calorie intake being approximately 2000 per day for women and 2500 per day for men. Levels of malnutrition remain high among poor women (Jose & Navaneetham, 2008). The differences in food types given to men and women can be seen clearly emerging during adolescence, with boys being given more protein and vitamin rich foods such as legumes, eggs, fruit and root vegetables. Adolescent boys are also given more milk and meat products than are girls (Aurino, 2017). One study of child health in India showed that girls tend to receive lower quality food and less expensive food, such as grains rather than milk and fat (see Shaikh et al., 2016). This could be attributed to the fact that in poorer households, there is a common belief that breadwinners of the family need to be allocated more food (Harris-Fry et al., 2017), which in most cases are the men of the family. In summary, research shows that poverty affects women more than it affects men, as it gives women a weaker fall-back status that leads to a lack of control and access to household resources (Sonpar & Kapur, 2001).

### ***2.2.1 Poverty and gender dynamics at home***

Poverty greatly impacts gender dynamics, including decision-making, control of assets, and other expressions of power within a household, so increased emphasis has been devoted to addressing poverty by empowering women economically (Hughes et al., 2015). However, economic empowerment of women increases household tension and conflict around the shift in gender roles, and at times increases the assertion of household authority by men (Hughes et al., 2015).

When a household has a limited income, most of the resources are used for providing the male children with quality health care, education and food, as compared to those used for girls (Kapur, 2019). The preference for sons advantages them throughout their childhood, as sons are allotted more food and nutrition than are daughters (Fledderjohann et al., 2014). Coping strategies for houses with food shortages are for women to reduce food consumption and skip meals to ensure that the male members of the family are well fed (Ramachandran, 2007). Jose and Navaneetham (2008) stressed that while social disadvantage and malnutrition are co-related, economic disadvantage is the most important factor enforcing women's malnutrition in India.

### **2.3 THE IMPACT OF EDUCATION ON WOMEN'S AUTONOMY**

The autonomy of women refers to the extent of a woman's ability to participate in formulating and executing decisions about domestic affairs, health care, resource distribution and family planning in coordination with male family members such as a husband or father (Haque, Islam, Tareque & Mostofa, 2011). Autonomy can also be loosely defined as the degree of a woman's access to material and social resources within a household, community or society at large (Jejeebhoy & Sathar, 2001).

Women with a good education have more autonomy and control over their household resources, reducing the gender bias against women. Increased control enables women to improve their autonomy, status and power relations within their households (Haque et al., 2011). For example, if a woman can assert her opinion on the investment of finances of the household or the educational choices for her children, this increases her status within the family and strengthens her relationships within the house. According to Kapur (2019), the literacy rate of men in certain parts of North India is around 83%, whereas among women it is only 67%. Among rural communities, only 2.2% of women completed their education to the level of graduation or more. This is important, because educated, working mothers are less likely to differentiate among the genders when allocating nutrient dense food resources such as milk, fish, and meat etc. (Bose, 2011).

In addition, women with a graduate level of education (i.e. a degree) demonstrate no gender preference compared to women with less or no education (Gupta & Yesudian, 2006). Bose (2011) stated that baby girls with mothers who are not working and do not have a primary education, receive less supplemental food as compared to that of baby boys. An accepting attitude towards gender equality is more than one and a half times greater for women with a middle school education (i.e. for 11 to 14 year olds) and threefold times greater for women with a high school education (Gupta & Yesudian, 2006). As boys are more likely to gain formal primary education and thus contribute to the family budget, parental bias is reflected in their allocation of nutritious and diverse foods such as milk products and meat, especially during adolescence (Aurino, 2017). Adolescence is a transitional stage of life when gender norms start becoming more pronounced and start affecting young women's life and well-being (Aurino, 2017).

## **2.4 THE EFFECT OF WOMEN'S ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTION TO THE HOUSEHOLD**

As noted previously, an important factor in establishing autonomy for women is their income and economic contribution to the household. Although, most women are involved in household work such as cooking, cleaning and taking care of children, their economic independence and added status within the household is dependent on wage earning activities such as working on farms or in factories (Jejeebhoy & Sathar, 2001). Women with low status tend to have weaker control over their domestic resources (Ramachandran, 2007). In most cases, high status for a woman can be achieved through her economic contribution to the household. If the woman is making a substantial financial contribution to her household, she might have more input to important decisions such as the distribution of household resources (Acharya et al., 2010).

In many parts of the North Indian region, women do not make the decision to work on their own, or have control over their income (Jejeebhoy & Sathar, 2001). They are often forced to work outside the home by their in-laws and give their entire pay to their in-laws. In such cases, women work outside the home for wages as well as doing unpaid household work in their home. In rural communities, women often work in agriculture or with livestock, if they do not have the education to pursue anything else (Jejeebhoy & Sathar, 2001).

Another point to be considered is the wages for men and women are different. Women are paid less than are men. Even with long working hours, the economic contribution of a woman is not enough to give her same control over domestic resources as a man has (Jejeebhoy & Sathar, 2001). Therefore, the gender pay gap is a further instrument of discrimination against women associated with the underlying factors discussed previously, for example, limited access to quality education (Neumayer & Soysa, 2007).

## **2.5 NUTRITION**

The social privileging of boys perpetuates gender food bias, affecting the health and nutrition of young girls. Girls in the central rural North Indian region are less likely to receive fresh milk, eggs, chicken and other poultry products than are boys. The lack of high protein foods allocated to young girls could be a leading cause of their high mortality rate (Singh, 2019). This dietary bias is linked to cultural beliefs about the high status of certain foods that are considered more expensive, and therefore, intended only to be consumed by more valued members of a family (Harris-Fry et al., 2017), in this case, the

boys and men. Nutritionally impoverished foods, less fresh food and not enough food, directly reduce the health and well-being of women and girls. For example, women who eat only leftover meals or do not add vegetables to their daily diet can expect effects on their overall health, such as being susceptible to deficiency-related diseases.

Generally, girls have to go without a regular supply of milk and fats, which is a significant disadvantage to their health, and if a girl does ask for food, she may be questioned and ridiculed about her poor economic contribution to the household (Jatrana, 2003). Nutritional penalties for girls begins at an early age. Gender discrimination is evident in breastfeeding practices, with boys being breastfed longer than girls (Aurino, 2017). Girls on average, are breastfed 0.45 fewer months than are boys (Fledderjohann et al., 2014). This can be attributed to the fact that if a mother has girls and hopes to have a son, less time spent breast feeding means she can conceive her next child, hopefully a son, sooner. Pervasive societal norms decree that the status of a woman is elevated according to the number of sons she can produce for her family (Bose, 2011).

## **2.6 THE IMPACT OF SOCIO-CULTURAL NORMS ON FOOD BIAS**

Distribution of resources such as food are influenced by various socio-cultural norms and practices in relation to gender and family relationships (Madjdian & Bras, 2016). The word “family” is derived from the Latin word “*familia*” and refers to a group of people living together and bound to each other by biological and social relationships. These family systems influence people’s health outcomes in different ways (Madjdian & Bras, 2016). This is especially the case in India where the society is a collectivistic one and promotes interdependence of family members (Chadda & Deb, 2013). In North Indian societies, it is the norm for males and females to eat their meals separately (Desai & Andrist, 2010); it is only after the men have finished their meal, that the women sit down to eat. Women and adolescent girls follow this ritualistic practice irrespective of how hungry they are, as it is believed that since men and boys earn the money, they need to be fed first (Ghosh, 2004).

Certain festivals also perpetuate the food bias against women, and are camouflaged as a societal custom. In Indian society, religious and cultural practices are an important aspect of day to day activities and have an impact on health and well-being (Kalra et al., 2015). Festivals such as *Karva Chauth* and *Guru Purnima* reinforce male privilege, as in these, women fast to pray for a long life for their husbands, and *Hoi Ashtami* is observed by women who fasting for their sons’ longevity (Kalra et al., 2015). Other festivals such as

*Ekadashi*, *Purnima*, and *Pradosha* are weekly fasts undertaken by women (Kalra et al., 2015). These are aligned to other practices that profoundly weaken women's health and perpetuate the food deprivation by encouraging gendered fasting practices for women, but not for men.

### **2.6.1 The system of dowry**

The system of dowry is an age-old tradition in India. The modern dowry system has its roots in the traditional Hindu practice of *Kanyadaan*, meaning “the gift of the virgin bride,” at a Hindu wedding (Kamruzzaman, 2015). In this practice, gifts such as money, property or household goods are given from the bride's family to the groom's family as a token of good wishes (Gondal, 2015). Historically, dowry served as a form of inheritance and security for women, as they were not allowed to inherit family property, and it now has a central role in determining a woman's place in her in-laws' home (Lee, 2004). Today however, the dowry system has evolved into a transfer of wealth from the bride's family to the groom's family, and is an important negotiating factor within the marriage (Gondal, 2015). The greater the assets brought by the bride as a dowry, the greater her bargaining power within the household and her access to better food resources (Ramachandran, 2006). The in-laws show preferential treatment to a daughter-in-law who brings a substantial dowry, by giving her less responsibilities and more resources such as food (Srinivasan & Lee, 2004).

Young girls are given less food or education than are boys, as they are bound to get married; social conditioning for the role of wife begins long before girls leave their natal home, and often as soon as they reach puberty. Girls and women are expected to work hard, performing household chores. After marriage, a girl is expected to serve her husband's relatives and cater to their needs (Rollefson, 2018). She is expected to be submissive and follow her mother-in-law's orders without raising her voice in front of her husband, and is expected to eat after everyone else is fed (Rollefson, 2018).

A strong preference for sons in the north is tied to the marginalisation of women in the kinship structure. After marriage, a woman is under the authority of her in-laws and has limited say in domestic decisions and limited freedom (Jejeebhoy & Sathar, 2001). However, this does not mean that girls are valued by their birth families. Not having a daughter means not having to pay for her dowry or spend resources on *paraya dhan* - someone else's wealth (Ghosh, 2004).

A girl's status as married, unmarried or widowed, also affects her access to resources within the family. Widowhood is inherently gendered and in patriarchal cultures, remarriage may not be a realistic option for women (Perkins et al., 2016). Widowed women often suffer through a life of unemployment, isolation and vulnerability, facing discrimination in property rights and allocation to good food, clothes and other material objects (Niswade, 2015). Social convention dictates that upon losing her husband, the main purpose of a woman's life is lost, so she is then viewed as a burden to her in-laws. According to traditional customs, widowed women may wear only plain clothing, eat only two or fewer meals per day, and avoid social events (Perkins et al., 2016).

### ***2.6.2 Practices and rituals transmitting food bias***

As mentioned previously, in certain parts of India, segregation during meal-times is common, so men and women cannot dine together. According to Desai and Andrist (2010), in most households it would be unthinkable for a young daughter-in-law to dine with her father-in-law. In this way, cultural beliefs restrict women's mobility and their control over resources (Desai & Andrist, 2010). This practice greatly reinforces food bias against women, as eating last means eating potentially spoiled food, which may cause illness. As outlined in section 2.5 on nutrition, consuming foods that are nutritionally impoverished affects the health and well-being of women and girls. Consuming leftover meals or meals with less fresh food, makes women and girls susceptible to deficiency-related diseases.

### ***2.6.3 Social mechanisms that enforce gendered domination***

In central rural North India, there are a number of social mechanisms at play that enforce gendered domination. Young married women often isolate themselves at home and avoid interaction with the community, a practice known as *purdah*, making it common for women to ascribe superiority to their husbands, and hence serve their men first and themselves last (Harris-Fry et al., 2017).

The *purdah* system refers to when women cover their heads and faces in public or in front of men who are not their husbands (Rollefson, 2018). It is a tool for gender segregation that governs all interactions between men and women by limiting women's access to public spaces or forcing them to cover themselves with a veil (Shaheed, 2016). They are not allowed to speak or sit on chairs in the presence of men as this is considered disrespectful, although these expectations can change when they visit their natal family

(Rollefson, 2018). This is inferred to be a kind of social conditioning that women are subjected to as a way to control their behaviours and movements.

In a family it is expected that the woman adjusts to her new household responsibilities when she marries; an adjustment she has been acculturated to since childhood. This expected virtuous behaviour is promoted through service, obedience and servility (Ghosh, 2004). The hierarchical relationships imply that the patriarch (the male head of the family) has authority over the other family members, or more precisely, the women of the family (Jejeebhoy & Sathar, 2001).

## **2.7 SUMMARY**

The literature review provided an insight into food and gender in a global as well as an Indian context. It acknowledges the various aspects of Indian society such as the socio-cultural norms, education, women's autonomy and other factors associated with a gendered food bias in central North India. The existent literature focuses mainly on the nutritional aspects of a gendered food bias along with some of the underlying characteristics of Indian society that furthers a gendered bias and explores the roots of such a bias. However, an exploration of the mechanisms or underlying reasons that perpetuate a gendered food bias in the region of central rural North India has been neglected. Therefore, the next chapter provides an insight into the qualitative feminist methodology used in this study to determine the functioning of social norms and gender based privileges and penalties.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter outlines the aims and objectives of this research along with the ontology, epistemology and paradigm. It also explains the qualitative feminist methodology used to conduct this research in order to ascertain the functioning of social norms and gender-based privilege and penalty. The chapter provides a detailed insight into the sample design of the study along with information about the secondary data collection from YouTube videos and analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) method of thematic analysis. The chapter also explains the ethical approval needed for the research along with an explanation about the trustworthiness of the research and the limitations of the methods used.

### **3.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTION**

This study aimed to explore the gendered food bias in a central rural North Indian household. The two research questions are as follows:

1. What are the underlying reasons behind the bias in food distribution among genders in central North Indian rural homes?
2. What are the mechanisms that perpetuate this bias?

### **3.3 ONTOLOGY, EPISTEMOLOGY AND PARADIGM**

Some concepts need to be explained, as they grounded the study. Ontology can be understood as the science of the nature of truth, or the assumptions about the nature of reality (Booyesen & Pringle, 2018). It deals with the question "what is reality?" from the view-point of the researcher. Epistemology is the science of knowing, and questions how we know what we know or how the researcher comes to know reality (Booyesen & Pringle, 2018).

#### ***3.3.1 Ontology and epistemology***

In this study, the ontological as well as the epistemological approach was a feminist perspective. Feminism is a belief that men and women are of equal worth, and because in most societies men are privileged, it is necessary to achieve equality among the genders, and understand that gender intersects with other social hierarchies (Launius & Hassel, 2018). Feminism is also about effecting changes in gender relations that turn a critical eye on various institutions in society, questioning the inequality under which people live



(Buchanan & Bryman, 2009). A feminist research approach can examine the hierarchical structures within the household and question the inequality of food allocation among men and women. Overall, the approach questions why women are at the lower end of the societal spectrum, so it focuses on inequality and subordination.

According to Gray (2013), feminism views women as an oppressed social class. This can be attributed to the fact that men often come from a position of dominance, so their knowledge of the world is one of privilege, whereas in contrast, women have access to a different reality through their personal experiences (Gray, 2013). Since this research aimed at observing the lives and realities of women suffering from bias and oppression, insights into their social positioning within the family organisation and their personal experiences through a feminist lens, helped solidify the stance of the research and position the discussion and argument better.

The theoretical lens used in the study was a gendered organisation approach (see Calás, Smircich & Holvino, 2013), wherein the family structure is viewed as if it is an organisation, with gender being the focal point. Gender can be viewed as a primary cultural frame for coordinating social relations, as people often draw on gender stereotypes in which gendered roles are embedded (Calás et al., 2013). This fits well with the inherent categorisation of gender within a family organisation, and the social expectations of women to conform to the role of caregiver, and as part of their gendered role, to consume less food within the household. The reason for adopting this approach was because it de-naturalises and understands how formal structures become hierarchically organised by gender (Calás et al., 2013).

In the gendered organisations approach, issues of gender and organisations are often established as having to do with the socially ascribed domestic roles and responsibilities of women, often in comparison with those of men (Calás et al., 2013). When viewing the family structure as an organisation, the focus was on examining inequality through the hierarchical structure and organising processes that convey power relations and gendered inequalities.

This study focused on the processes through which food and nutrition were distributed in households, to examine inequality among the genders. Critical gender scholars believe that gender inequality is the outcome of individuals “practising gender” through the micro-practices of daily life. This contributes to the perpetuation of gender biases in

organisations (Calás et al., 2013). This can be observed in everyday gendered practices in households as illustrated in Chapter 2, and include behaviours such as serving small portions of food to girls or serving more food to the man of the house, perpetuating a gender hierarchy within the family structure and illustrating the idea of practising gender. For example, during mealtimes, asking young girls to serve food to their fathers and brothers before they consume it could be related to hierarchical roles within a family, while also demonstrating the roles and responsibilities associated with each gender.

The literature on gender stratification within organisations focuses on organisational activities and practices that are discriminatory in nature and primarily affect women in large numbers (Calás et al., 2013). This means that the very fabric of the organisation is gender stratified, from standard practices to everyday activities. Within that context, it can be understood that much like the organisational structure, the family structure too is inherently gender stratified (Cha, 2013). Therefore, gendered practices such as food bias greatly affect women's quality of life. The bias that affects women is reflected in so-called gender-neutral organisations, and benefit some members at the expense of others (Calás et al., 2013). Family structures and food allocation processes can also be examined in this way.

The gendered organisation approach has feminist theoretical underpinnings which fit well with my philosophical beliefs, as explained in the introduction. The benefit of this approach is that it focuses on the cultural meanings of gendering as well as the implications of inequality and subordination (see Calás et al., 2013). The literature review detailed extensive societal and domestic discrimination against women living in North India, evidenced in empirical and sociological studies. This study set out to examine the underlying causes of this discrimination, with the aim of enabling social change, and therefore, a feminist approach was considered to be the most appropriate given the researcher's positioning. For this study, it was important to understand the power play between genders and how this negatively affected women, for which a feminist perspective is better suited than a positivist approach, where the researcher is presumed to be objective (see Booyesen & Pringle, 2018).

### ***3.3.2 Paradigm***

The theoretical framework or paradigm that fits the feminist and gendered organisations approach is social constructionism. A paradigm is the belief system or world view that guides the way researchers do research (Booyesen & Pringle, 2018). The social

constructionist approach states that reality as we know it is socially constructed by individuals, and gender is a social institution (Martin, 2003). This means that everything society entails, including cultures, traditions and practices related to gender, is a reality because it was collectively decided for it to be that way. Gender is socially constructed as it refers to social or cultural traits that are given to men and women; it is performative and socially constructed throughout life (Street & Dardis, 2018).

Social constructionism examines the ways in which events, realities, experiences and so on are the effects of the many discourses that operate within society (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Buchanan and Bryman (2009), it also reveals the cultural taken-for-granted-ness that leads naturally presumed objects to be formed and understood in specific ways. In this research, this concept helped in understanding the inherently gendered structures of society and question the constructed reality of hierarchy - for example, why women of the same social standing, age and life experiences as men are still considered to have less hierarchal status than have men.

### **3.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

As explained, a qualitative feminist methodology was adopted for this study, as this helped to explore the gendered nature of the rural North Indian society in greater depth. The position taken on gender is that it does not simply originate from the presence of women, but rather, it is a principle of social organisation, institutional, and cultural practices, and not simply something connected to individuals (Kumra et al., 2014). Since a qualitative study is often used to understand the underlying reasons for and opinions about phenomena, it was suitable for this study, which aimed to understand the issue of a food bias against women. Secondary data were used for this study.

### **3.5 DATA COLLECTION**

Qualitative research focuses on words and observations that express individuals' differing understandings and looks at individuals in natural situations (Amaratunga, Baldry et al., 2002), by exploring their lived experiences and multiple realities (Booyesen & Pringle, 2018). Therefore, a qualitative approach was appropriate to explore food hierarchies within families and the socio-cultural factors that affect them. The feminist perspective looks at problematic situations and institutions that frame women's lives (Creswell, 2012), so was regarded as compatible with the qualitative data collection and analysis methods used in this study.

Insights were obtained through viewing and interpreting YouTube videos that reflected the life of people in central rural North Indian homes, by observing participants' behaviours, gestures, tones of voice, emotions, expressions and verbal cues. The data were collected through secondary YouTube video sources as YouTube had gained popularity in India after the launch of Reliance Jio by the Telecom Industry in India. Jio is a broadband service giving free unlimited calls, and data at an extremely low cost to more than 150 million subscribers across India (Kulkarni & Vel, 2019). This has enabled people from rural areas to gain access to the internet and share their daily lives online to an interested audience, as a means of entertainment and to make extra money from online advertising.

Selected channels were viewed through a feminist lens by the researcher, identifying practices and behaviours that reflected gender-based privilege and penalty. The videos were viewed and analysed multiple times and the researcher took down notes in order to capture important insights. The notes were then analysed multiple times in order to be refined further to cross check their relevance to the videos.

### **3.6 SAMPLING**

The purpose of this study was to obtain in-depth information about the reasons and mechanisms that perpetuate a gendered food bias in rural North Indian homes. For this reason, purposive sampling was the appropriate method to collect the required data. Purposive sampling is selective and uses a group of sampling techniques that rely on the judgement of the researcher (Sharma, 2017). To show how the social norms worked, a sample group that filled the criteria of demonstrating routine family life in habitual domestic settings had to be chosen and explored to reflect how gendered food norms affect women. The sample was taken from social media (YouTube) that best reflects the activities of the current society. The main aim of the research was to understand the underlying reasons behind the bias in food distribution among genders in central North Indian rural homes and to uncover the mechanisms that perpetuate this bias.

The researcher listed potential YouTube channels that had the data required for the study while keeping the sample size in mind. The sample size for this study was small as the time period and depth of the research had to be taken into consideration. The researcher aimed to use no more than three YouTube channels as a sample, with not more than five videos from each channel. The YouTube sources used reflected the reality of rural North Indian society and mirrored its norms. Although television and print media do fit into this

category, they were not chosen as a sample, as in India, mass media is available in multiple languages, so it would have been difficult to narrow down to content suited to the research; hence these were discounted as potential sources of data.

### **3.7 RESEARCH PROCEDURE FOR DATA COLLECTION**

The researcher found five suitable channels. *Anishka ka kitchen*, *Indian mom studio*, *North-Indian cooking*, *Easy kitchen masters* and *Punjabi kitchen*, and *Real bharat* which were identified through a YouTube search using words such as “Indian cooking”, “rural cooking”, “Indian food”, “rural food”, “Indian women”, and “village cooking”. The data were from home videos made by people in rural North India that showed their lifestyle and food habits. Six videos were identified in each channel, out of which five were finalised for selection after careful observation. Further into the data collection, two channels were removed from the list: *Anishka ka kitchen* and *Indian mom studio*. *Anishka ka kitchen* was removed because on further observation, the content of the channel was found to mostly show cooking recipes, and although it did show social interaction as well as a glimpse into the culture of the local people, it did not highlight gender interactions in a way that would further the research. *Indian mom studio* was also removed from the sample, as the channel reflected the life of an individual, and since this research was looking at a rural domestic environment, the content of the channel could not be used.

YouTube channels that are a platform for young married homemakers between the ages of 20 to 35, the most representative age group of contemporary Indian women, reflected the reality of the lives of many women around the country. Three channels were chosen as a final sample from which to review and collect data, then analyse visual and verbal text to answer the research questions. To find these channels, the researcher logged on to the YouTube site and searched for channels that would fit the sample. The channels that were narrowed down to, were *North Indian cooking*, *Indian mom studio*, and *Real bharat*. Five videos from each channel were viewed making a total of 15 videos that were uploaded between the years 2015-2019. YouTube was chosen as a data source and sample because it is currently a popular platform in India and has grown exponentially in the last few years. YouTube blogs in particular have become an uncensored mirror of society and give an extremely authentic picture of what is happening in the lives of real people. In the channels that were chosen, young women are portrayed as taking the audience through their daily lives in their households, giving the audience a glimpse into their reality.

The data were collected over two weeks between the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 14<sup>th</sup> of September 2019. The data were collected in Auckland, New Zealand without any major limitations, as the videos were freely available on the internet.

*Table 1: The YouTube sample.*

<b>Channels</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Reach</b>	<b>No. of videos</b>	<b>Total no. of videos</b>
<i>North-Indian cooking</i>	2015-2019	357K	5	15
<i>Easy cooking masters and Punjabi culture</i>	2015-2019	16.7K	5	
<i>Real bharat</i>	2015-2019	64.1K	5	

### **3.8 DATA ANALYSIS**

The analysis method used in this study was thematic analysis of secondary data. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns or themes in data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It organises and describes data while interpreting various aspects of a research topic. Since this research looked at factors that affect a gendered food bias in central North-Indian homes, recognising themes in the data established and underlined the social issues that guided the research. This research method also integrates well with the social constructionist paradigm, as with this approach, patterns can be identified as socially produced (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Consistent with that, thematic analysis is a method that works to reflect reality and unravel the surface of the reality (Braun & Clarke, 2006). All the data sources were analysed in the same manner by observing the social interaction among the genders, viewing individual and group mannerisms and behaviours in a domestic rural environment.

Qualitative data analysis can be understood as the analysis of visual, audio, or textual data (Mihas, 2019). Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis were used as a guide to help with analysing data. This approach helps assimilate important points and themes within the data and also assists with organising data in a sequential manner. Figure 1 presents the process followed in analysing data.

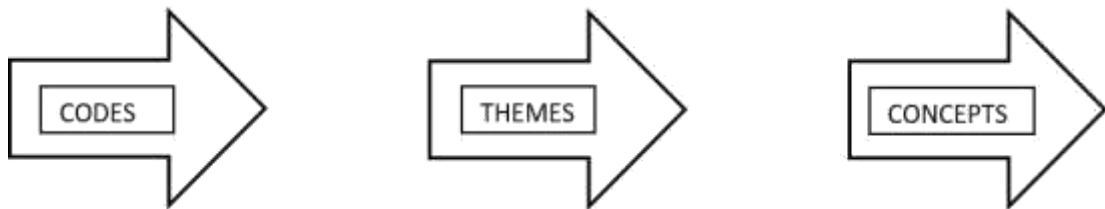


Figure 1: Illustrative process of thematic analysis.

### **Steps of analysis**

#### ***1. Familiarization with data***

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), an important step is to observe all available data and begin noting down all things that stand out as important. In the study, the first step began by looking at various journal articles, visual images and texts from popular media such as newspapers and magazines as well as the social media platform, YouTube. The researcher read through a large amount of material to identify overall themes and problems in the literature, then went through the data multiple times in order to pin point important aspects in it. These were noted in a notebook and then printed, and anything that seemed important such as re-occurring practices of bias, were highlighted. During this phase, certain factors such as poverty emerged as significant, and played an essential role in the investigation of gendered food bias.

#### ***2. Generate initial codes***

This is the second phase of the data analysis and according to Braun and Clarke (2006), it is during this phase that production of initial codes from the data occurs. The researcher narrowed down even more points on the data that had initially been highlighted. Giving equal attention to each data item was important and so was identifying major aspects within the data that may form the basis of repeated patterns (see Braun and Clarke, 2006). The researcher looked at major overarching themes, such as the authority of men or the importance of age and hierarchy within a family, and systematically worked through the data in this way.

#### ***3. Search for themes***

This phase re-focuses on the analysis of broader themes rather than codes and involves sorting different codes into themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). To further sort the data into solid themes, the researcher used post-it notes and physically sorted the data into theme piles. The data were segregated so the commonalities across all the different data items were visible and easy to identify. For example, similar behaviours of male entitlement or women's domestic labour were grouped together to form general themes.

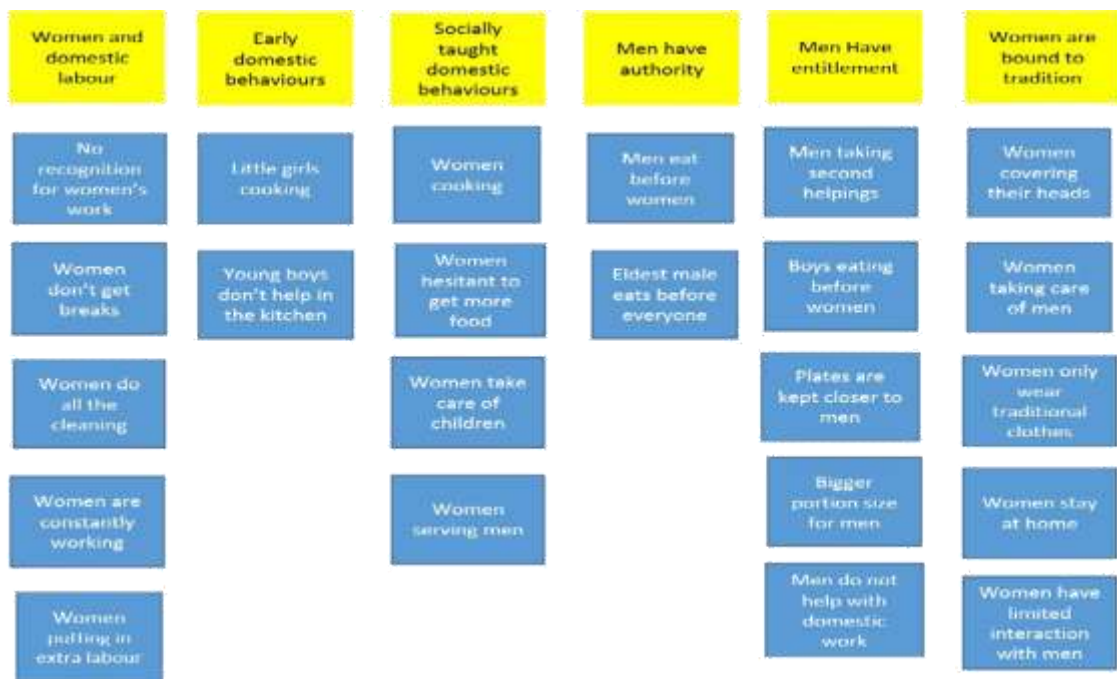


Figure 2: General themes (yellow) organised by referring to basic codes (blue)

#### **4. Review themes**

In this phase, the validity of individual themes in relation to the data is important (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher refined the themes in this phase and looked for a correlation between the different themes that emerged. It is important for data within different themes to cohere meaningfully, while also having identifiable distinctions between the different themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher looked at all the major themes that had been segregated and combed through the data that had similarities and differences to find overlapping information. For example, behaviours such as the male head of the house eating first or the domestic socialisation of women and girls were considered as themes.



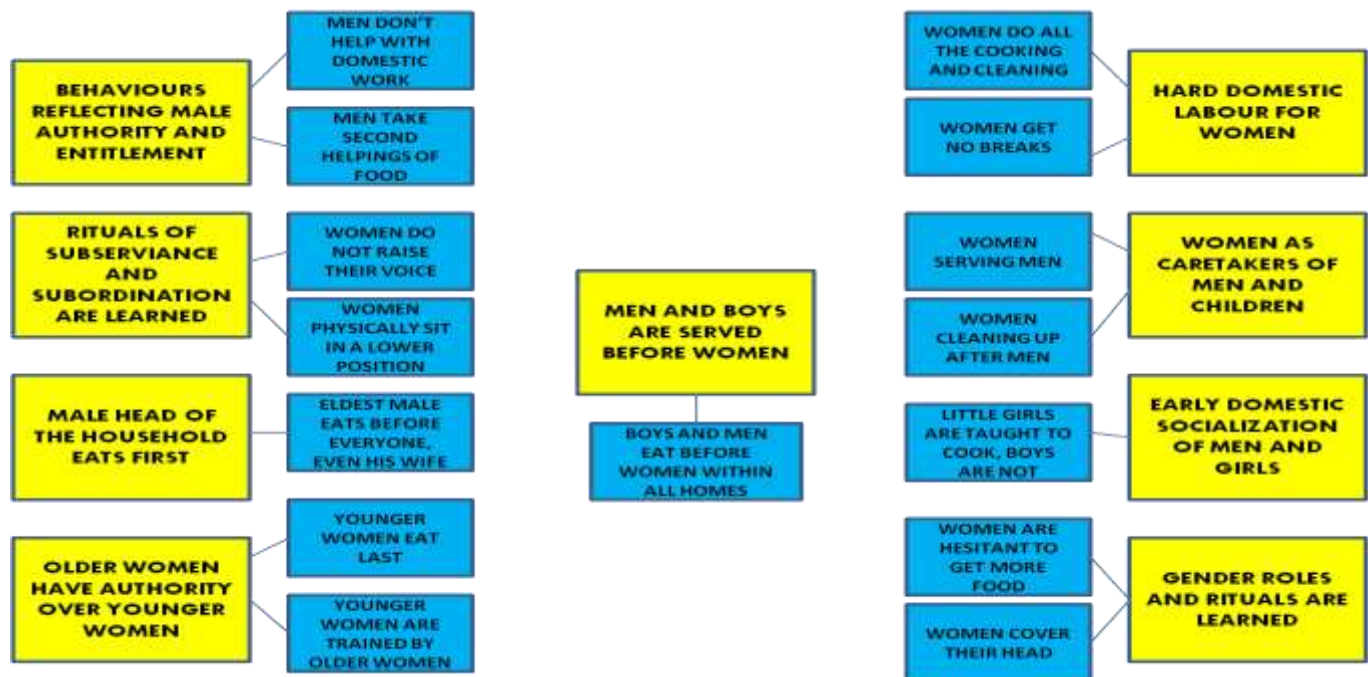


Figure 3: Sorted themes (yellow) organised by referring to a few selected examples of general themes and codes (blue)

### 5. Define and name themes

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), in this phase it is essential to define and further refine the themes that will be presented for analysis and then analyse the data within them. It is also important to identify the essence of each theme. There were certain themes that became evident in the analysis: family hierarchy, roles of service and traditional norms of behaviour. All these themes had a direct or indirect impact on gendered food bias in rural central North Indian homes and were factors that shaped the lives of women in these areas.

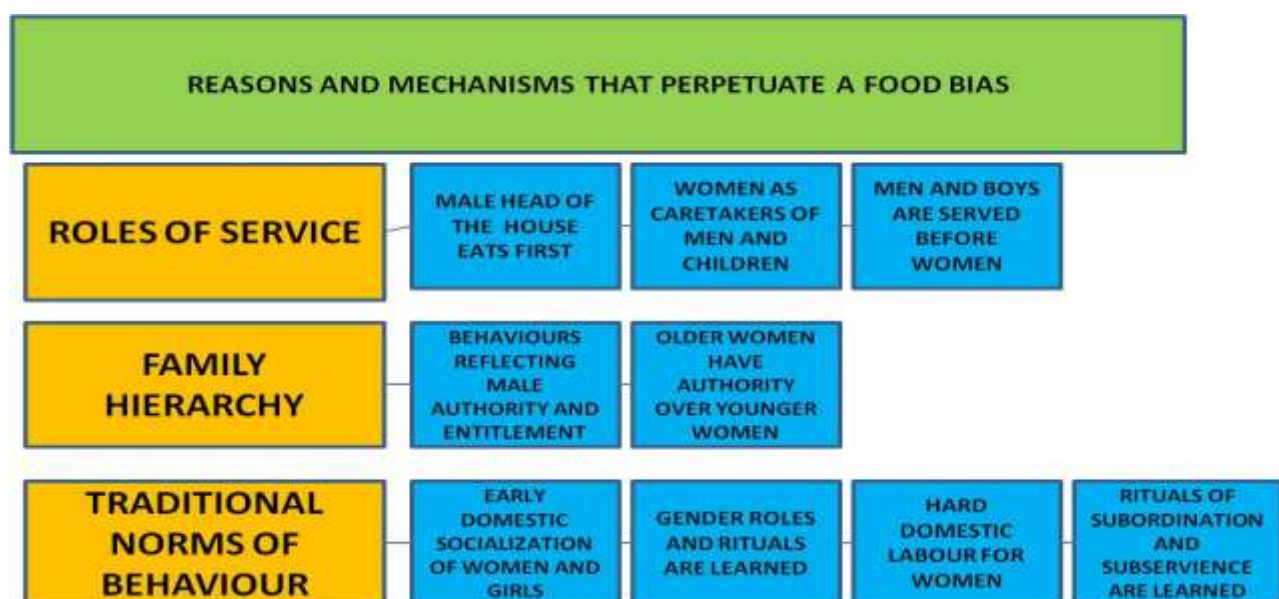


Figure 4: Final themes (Orange) sorted by looking at organised themes (blue).

## ***6. Produce the report***

In this final step, the researcher has a set of fully worked-out themes, and begins the final write-up and analysis of the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For this study the final write-up and analysis of the report are in the findings and discussions chapters. The findings and discussion are based on the analysis.

## **3.9 ETHICS**

This research used secondary data from the video platform YouTube. The data were collected by observation of the videos online and required no personal interaction with any participants. Therefore, there was no need for ethics approval to conduct the research. However, keeping in mind the sensitivity of the subject matter, the researcher explored and collected the data respectfully, honouring the culture and traditions of the participants in the videos.

## **3.10 TRUSTWORTHINESS IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

Qualitative research as compared to quantitative research, is often subjective, and dependent on the interpretation of the researcher. Qualitative studies are often extensively narrative and tend to require a different structure to a quantitative study. Therefore, to verify rigour, four main criteria need to be fulfilled: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability (Guba & Lincoln, 1987).

### ***3.10.1 Credibility***

Credibility refers to the extraction of plausible information drawn from participants' original data and is a correct interpretation of the participants' views (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). This practice asserts that the researchers' role is to be persistent in their observations in order to identify characteristics and elements that are relevant to the problem studied. In this research, credibility was achieved through explaining the thematic networks that showed the development of concepts from themes and codes along with the presentation and context of the rural settings within which the participants lived, from rich data.

### ***3.10.2 Transferability***

Transferability is the degree to which the results of the research can be transferred to other contexts or settings (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). This study was descriptive of behaviour as well as the contexts of the settings within which the lives of the participants were set. Although the study is qualitative, it can be considered representative of a larger

geographical area in India, with different patriarchal communities and cultures, as the results are reflective of struggles faced by women on a larger scale. The behaviour and experiences described in this study are conveyed in-depth to allow the data to be interpreted easily by those not familiar with the geographical location, and words associated with Indian society and culture.

### ***3.10.3 Dependability***

Dependability relates to the evaluation of the findings, interpretation and recommendations of the study that are supported by the data (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). This method maintains transparency within the data process and describes the research steps from the beginning to the development of the findings. The data collected and analysed for this research were from specifically named YouTube videos and the thematic analysis used to interpret the data was presented in written text and visual diagrams.

### ***3.10.4 Confirmability***

Confirmability is linked to dependability, and enables transparency within the research process. It is the degree to which the findings of the study could be confirmed by other researchers (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Confirmability is important to establish that the data and interpretations of the findings are not figments of the researcher's imagination but are derived from the data. Since this research used the visual platform of YouTube, all the data are available for any individual to view, and although the interpretation can differ from person to person, the data cannot be influenced or guided by anything other than the content in the videos.

## **3.11 LIMITATIONS**

A limitation of this study was a language barrier, as the language spoken in the videos was not the native language of the researcher. Although the data required a visual interpretation technique, the researcher did not have an overall understanding of the language, so was reliant on visual cues. Had the videos been in a language in which the researcher was fluent, this may have enhanced the quality of the data collected as there would have been a greater understanding of the interpersonal communication among participants, making the data collection more effective. Nevertheless, the study gives insights into the lives of women in rural North India and their struggles within their socio-cultural environment.

Another limitation faced was a cultural barrier and the subjectivity of the interpretation of the actions and gestures of the video participants. As observed, a qualitative study is subjective, so various factors in the research are dependent on the researcher's perspective and interpretation. As the researcher does not share the same local culture as those of the video participants, interpretation of interactions of gestures, activities and reasoning for certain behaviours was a challenge. However, the data were reflective of the daily lives and rituals of the participants, which helped the researcher gain a fresh perspective on the domestic situations of women and men in rural North India.

### **3.12 SUMMARY**

This chapter outlined the feminist research stance along with the gendered organisations approach that was employed in this research. Also provided, was the social constructionist philosophy of the researcher, along with an extensive description of the qualitative methodology used for the research. This chapter explained the data collection methods and sample used, as well as the six step process of thematic analysis used to analyse the secondary data.

## **CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter presents the findings from viewing three Indian YouTube channels: *North Indian Cooking*, *Real Bharat*, and *Easy Cooking Masters and Punjabi Culture*. This chapter identifies the mechanisms that perpetuate a gendered food bias in central rural North India and explores the ways gender based norms of privilege and penalty are transmitted and reinforced. The data collected from these visual platforms were grouped into three major themes: 1) family hierarchy 2) roles of service, and 3) traditional norms of behaviour. The findings are presented as textual data interpreting the behaviours, gestures, social roles and norms that reveal a gendered bias in terms of food allocation and distribution. The discussion section compares the findings to the literature in order to find commonalities.

All videos used in this study reflect the daily life of the people in the central rural North Indian region. Visual observations of the videos gave insights into the lifestyle and cultural norms expressed through behaviours and rituals. The videos were set in rural environments, and showed village people living in houses made of brick and cement with large front and back yards, where all the cooking took place. In each of the videos, the women took positions of domesticity, and were seen cooking and cleaning in a household, while men did not participate in any domestic work. In rural North India, most houses use open flame clay stoves for their cooking as these are more affordable than electric stoves; the food is often cooked and served in steel or clay utensils. The physical surroundings in these videos were often messy and disorganised, reflecting the unsophisticated lifestyles of the people in the village areas.

### **4.2 FAMILY HIERARCHY**

Various factors such as age, gender, position in the family, and relationships within the family, form the social hierarchy of a family and determine the distribution of resources, in this case, food. The videos show that the authoritative figure of a household was usually the eldest male member over the age of 50, followed by his male children. The eldest woman of the house had authority only over the younger women, portraying the “pecking order” within the family.

#### ***4.2.1 Behaviours reflecting male authority and entitlement***

The videos revealed the behaviours that direct and reflect on male authority and entitlement that are part of the family hierarchy. Within the family hierarchy, men hold the top positions as they are the bread earners. They have full authority and are held in the highest regard by the women in the family. Boys too are given similar preferential treatment, being fed first or given more food than the girls. Examples follow to illustrate typical behaviours.

The video *Swear di hajri di roti* (Easy cooking masters and Punjabi culture, 2019, 10:02), depicted male authority by a man in his 30s, who walked into the front yard and passed by without acknowledging the women cooking, asserting his sense of superiority over them. He then returned in changed clothes, wearing a white *kurta* and *pajama* (traditional North Indian attire), and asked what was being made, as he sat down to eat. His changed clothes indicated he had reached the end of his working day, while the woman was seen in the same clothes throughout, cooking and serving, indicating the exhausting continuation of her workday. The tone of the man's voice, stern and demanding, represented his authority over the women of the house, irrespective of their age.

Another representation of male authority was seen in *Women making pranthas of cauliflower and broccoli at home* (Easy cooking masters and Punjabi culture, 2019, 12:09), in which a man in his mid-30s walked into the front yard of his house while a male voice off-camera asked the women cooking, to serve him some food. The voice of the second male was in a joking and condescending tone, indicating superiority and by extension, authority over the women. He subtly demanded that the women serve flatbread to the man who had just walked in saying "Mum, give (me) some flatbread to eat". This shows that although he was speaking to his mother, being a man, his sense of authority surpassed his age and his relationship with the woman.

Similar behaviour was seen in the video *Aloo kachori made at home* (Easy cooking masters and Punjabi culture, 2019, 14:00), wherein a man jokingly demanded to eat the freshly made *kachoris*. Although he seemed to be "asking" for food, his tone was stern and insistent. His demands to start eating while the food was still being cooked portrayed his sense of entitlement and lack of consideration for the women. Furthermore, the man also asked for water to drink from the earthen pot as well as some fresh butter, both of which were served by an older woman who brought him these items. These demands, one after the other, showed him asserting his authority over the women of the house, and the

quiet agreement of the women and their quick pace in serving him, reflect their understanding of his authority over the household.

Similar authoritative and entitled behaviours such as the lack of acknowledgement of women, stern tone of voice, and demands, were not only displayed by the adult males but also portrayed by the young boys in the video, aged between 8 and 17. A manifestation of entitlement was evident in a video scene in *Ghiya ka raita* (Easy cooking masters and Punjabi culture, 2019, 12:29), demonstrated in an interaction between a young boy around the age of eight, and an older woman in her late 60s. In the video, the boy was seen sharing a plate of food with the older woman, presumably his grandmother. The boy took a plate of food where the older woman was sitting, and placed it in front of himself, while the older woman sitting close just took small portions from the same plate.

The video *Missi roti and chutney recipe made at home* (Easy cooking masters and Punjabi culture, 2019, 10:22), also displayed entitled behaviours by a young boy around the age of 13 walking in to an area where another boy, around 15, and a girl of around 14 were eating. He picked up a plate full of food and began eating it without any hesitation. The contrast here is that the girl who was also eating, seemed reserved and hesitant to get more food. The young boy was seen walking in with an air of confidence, and without waiting to determine who the food belonged to, picked up the plate that may or may not have been for him.

In the video *Jatt village women making methi ka paratha* (Real Bharat, 2019, 13:19), entitled behaviours were further demonstrated when a young boy around the age of eight. The boy was seen walking in as the woman cooked, and he poured a glass of buttermilk for himself. He did not acknowledge or ask the woman if he could help himself or if she would like some, showing his sense of entitlement to the nutrient rich buttermilk and his understanding of, and adherence to, gender roles at a young age.

In a video scene from *Jatt village family in Haryana* (Real Bharat, 2019, 14:09), a young man in his mid-30s, a young boy in his early teens, and a boy around the age of eight all sat down to eat while the woman in the video cooked. All three males served themselves large portions of vegetables as well as large glasses of fresh buttermilk without asking or serving the women, indicating their knowledge of preferential access to the food in front of them. They looked comfortable serving themselves and after eating did not clean up, leaving it for the woman to do later. This is an accurate representation of gender roles and

the way these manifest in people's daily lives. The actions of the men serving themselves without any consideration for the women, or not picking up after themselves reflect the privilege they have in society, and their understandings of the roles of each gender.

In the final video analysed, *Swear di hajri di roti* (Easy cooking masters and Punjabi culture, 2019, 10:02), a group of women were cooking when a man walked in and asked what was being made. He then playfully remarked that they should have made cauliflower flatbread instead of roti. His tone, although casual, had undertones of being demanding, indicating his lack of appreciation for the work the women put into making the meal. The women responded with a soft demeanour, stating they would make his choice of food next time, indicating the man's importance within the family structure. The timid behaviour by the women and the authoritative tone of the man show the manifestation of men and women's roles in society; male entitlement and women's subordination.

#### ***4.2.2 Older women's authority over younger women***

A representation of women's authority over younger women was seen in the first video, *Swear di hajri di roti* (Easy cooking masters and Punjabi culture, 2019, 10:02), wherein female authority and hierarchal order were represented by the older woman eating first, while the younger women cooked. The older woman was served food and finished her meal, indicating that she had a higher social position, and hence displayed authority over them. Her authority was also reflected in her steady and authoritative tone of voice when asking to be served, and her body language was confident and assertive.

#### ***4.2.3 Summary***

The findings from the videos reflected the social hierarchy in North Indian society through the depiction of gendered roles and norms and their manifestations, daily life and displays of authority. They affect the food habits and distribution of food among the genders, as the findings showed that males (young and adult) held authority over women within the domestic sphere, regardless of age and their relationship to them, leading to social biases against women, with food being the bias instrument.

#### ***4.2.4 Discussion***

As the findings in this section indicate, women are introduced to the domestic burden of cooking, cleaning and taking care of the household at an early age. Indian society at large, particularly North Indian society, is patriarchal and holds deeply rooted ideas about the subordination of women and the superiority of men (Dutt, 2018). The literature too,



indicates that from an early age, a girl child is domesticated and tamed in order to become an acceptable bride, and someone who would fit in with her in-laws' ways (Jeffery, 2018). For the prescribed feminine role, it is socially acceptable that a girl is obedient, undemanding and respectful of the decisions of her elders.

In the North Indian region, a woman's compliance is considered an important aspect of becoming a good wife and daughter-in-law, two roles that are looked on as being extremely important by society (Jeffery, 2018). As noted previously, girls are often pushed into domestic chores and responsibilities without consideration of their needs or wants, in terms of food or any other material items. If a girl does demand anything, she is often questioned and ridiculed (Jatrana, 2003). This leads to an internalisation within the girls that they do not need more food, as was seen in the videos *Missi roti and chutney recipe made at home* (Easy cooking masters and Punjabi culture, 2019, 10:22), wherein a young girl resisted taking a larger helping of nutritious food being served to her. The boys took food without hesitation, indicating they are regarded as authoritative figures despite their youth.

The findings reflect those of the previous studies on the social traditions of subservience of women across central rural North India. In this way, they throw light on how gender inequality has its roots in the social and cultural stratification of roles and responsibilities, and the different valuations of roles (Gupta & Yesudian, 2006).

### **4.3 Roles of service for women**

The previous section indicated that the social roles of service belong to women as the care givers within the family. The video clips suggest that women caring or serving men and boys in the family is a socially and culturally acceptable form of interaction between the genders.

#### ***4.3.1 Women as caretakers of men and children***

The interactions in the North Indian communities, as seen in the videos, reveal that women and girls are caretakers of men as well as of their children. An example is in the video *Village people evening daily routine* (Easy cooking masters and Punjabi culture, 2019, 13:03), in which a girl was seen plating a full meal of freshly made flatbread and vegetables on the side, and handing it to a man who simply walked in and sat down. The man's authoritarian behaviour suggested that these domestic actions are reserved for

women. The men who left their plates after a meal for the women to clean, affirmed that gendered roles of women as the caretakers of men are socially prescribed.

In another video, *Swear di hajri di roti* (Easy cooking masters and Punjabi culture, 2019, 10:02), the scene portrayed a man walking into a house, his body language and expressions reflecting his expectation of the fully plated meal before him. When the man sat down for his meal, Woman 1 served him fresh flatbread while Woman 5 poured him a glass of cold buttermilk. Woman 5 refilled his glass the moment he finished the first one, showing social conditioning and the implied gendered social norms that directed the role of a caretaker. The privilege of the man in receiving a second helping without any hesitation indicates his compliance with the gendered nature of the social structure.

#### ***4.3.2 The male head of the house eating first***

In a North Indian household, the oldest male head of the family eats first. The hierarchal structure plays an important role within the family in establishing and reinforcing social norms such as prioritising the man when food is served.

In *Women making pranthas of cauliflower and broccoli at home* (Easy cooking masters and Punjabi culture, 2019, 12:09), a conversation took place as an older woman plated a meal, and while she did that, a younger woman suggested that she should serve the father-in-law first. The woman suggesting the action acted in the role of a daughter-in-law, and the woman plating the meal was presumably the mother-in-law. The mother-in-law's expressions and nodding indicated her agreement with this suggestion. This scenario provides evidence of gendered social structure and functioning of the society wherein the head of the house or the eldest male member is served first, while his wife (who too is of a similar status within the household), does not expect to be served first. She eats after he has finished his meal and sometimes does not eat at all, depending on the availability of food.

In another video scene, *Indian breakfast routine* (North Indian cooking, 2019, 12:13), two women were seen cooking and serving an older man, who throughout the process was seen comfortably sitting on a bedstead nearby. The women plated a meal for the man, served it to him, and continued to cook as he began eating. The man was served two extra helpings of flatbread by the women. One of the women then joined the man on a chair beside him holding a plate with a small portion of food. It also illustrated the difference in the portion size of food, showing the gendered nature of prioritising a man's needs over

a woman's needs. The question that arises however, is why one woman ate while the other did not, as they both appeared to be around the same age. The answer could be in the social standing of the women within the family or the relationship between the two women, however a clear explanation could not be determined.

In a third video, *Punjabi village kitchen daily routine 2019* (North Indian cooking, 2019, 11:42), a similar pattern was seen wherein two women cooked and served a man. In this video, Woman 1 and Woman 2 spent a considerable amount of time preparing a meal, at least one or two hours, and then served the man who appeared to be the man of the house, as he looked to be around 60. Both women in this video scene followed the pattern of serving the man first, making sure he was taken care of. The man was seen sitting casually through the time that the women prepared a meal, his expression uninterested, indicating this was daily life for him.

#### ***4.3.3 Men and boys served before women***

In *Jatt village women making methi ka paratha* (Real Bharat, 2019, 13:19), two women were seen serving a young boy around the age of eight, an elderly man in his 60s, and a young man in his mid-30s. In this scene, a young boy sat down for meal and was served by Woman 1. She added extra butter to the flatbread while Woman 2 plated a meal, and along with a glass of buttermilk, served it to the older man who was sitting on the bedstead at a distance. Meanwhile, the younger man in his mid-30s sat down for his meal, as a plate was kept at the ready for him, with flatbread and plenty of fresh butter. All three men in this scene portrayed entitlement with their body language, expecting to be served by the women of the house.

Another video, *Jatt village family in Haryana* (Real Bharat, 2019, 14:09), portrayed a woman serving a young man in his 30s, and a young boy around the age of 8, indicating that gender was the only criteria for receiving food first, and not age, given that the young boy was served before any adult women in the house. Woman 1 was seen cooking and serving the man as well as the young boy, who in their body language showed privilege in their actions of simply walking in and expecting to be served a meal by the woman. This behaviour reflects social conditioning about gendered roles and norms within a family structure.

In a scene in *Punjabi breakfast kitchen routine* (North Indian cooking, 2019, 12:23), two women were seen cooking and serving the man of the house, and after serving the man,

they served themselves too, but far less than what the man was served. The women served the man three flatbreads on a large plate, along with a bowlful of vegetables. After he had finished eating, they took a piece of flatbread each on their palms, added the remaining vegetables to it, and ate it while the man was seen getting up and leaving. The women when serving themselves looked uninterested in the un-plated food they were about to consume. Social norms showcase the overindulgence in relation to the needs of the men and neglected needs of women. This behaviour is a result of social expectations of both genders in which the needs of men are prioritised over the needs of women.

#### ***4.3.4 Summary***

The videos showed the gendered expectations of the role of women as caretakers of the men as well children. Actions such as serving the male head of the house first and feeding the male children before the women, indicate the burden of nurturing placed upon women by social norms. Caretaking as one of the main role for women was illustrated in the video scenes, answering the question whether women are expected to nurture others while ignoring their own needs?

#### ***4.3.5 Discussion***

The cultural construct of Indian society reinforces gender bias among men and women to different degrees and in different contexts (Koli, 2017). This could be attributed to the fact that in poorer households, there is a strong belief that breadwinners of the family need to be allocated more food or need to be fed first (Harris-Fry et al., 2017), and in most cases, these are the men of the family. This was evident in the videos where girls and women were seen plating a nourishing meal and serving it to men of the house. This act reflects the hierarchy within the household as well as within the family structure, where the men are considered to be more important.

Families invest in men, as they have more labour opportunities, given the bias of employers towards men and against women (Harris-Fry et al., 2017). The Indian family system suggests a belief in a natural superiority of men over women in a family (Sultana, 2001). In many central North Indian households, women often eat the least throughout their lives (Ghosh, 2004). Women and adolescent girls often eat last, irrespective of how hungry they are, as it is believed that since men and boys work hard to earn money, they should be prioritised (Ghosh, 2004). In traditional mealtime rituals, boys eat separately with the men of the family, served by women. These videos reinforce the idea that a sense of entitlement is a learned behaviour in young boys who gain it through exposure to male

authoritarian figures in the family, and therefore perpetuate these behaviours in their households. The findings support the literature, indicating an established understanding of the role of women within a family organisation as caretakers, as well as a subordinate position.

#### **4.4 TRADITIONAL NORMS OF BEHAVIOUR**

The findings revealed that tradition plays a significant role in the distribution of food among the genders. Tradition is reflected in individuals' behaviours and group interactions. The behavioural pattern of introducing young girls to domestic responsibilities at an early age, with women serving the men first, and women preparing food from raw materials, and investing a three to four hours a day preparing meals without acknowledgement, reveal a tradition of socialisation of women into subservience.

##### ***4.4.1 Early domestic socialisation of women and girls***

In North India, early introduction to domestic socialisation positions girls as young as five to conform to the socially prescribed norms and roles of women. A video called *Little village girls making roti on wood fire* (North Indian cooking, 2019, 10:04), showed two girls around the age of five making flatbread in their backyard. An elderly woman in the background commented harshly, telling them their flatbread was burning, and suggesting that mistakes are unacceptable, while another woman came in and helped the little girls by turning the flatbread over for them as a way of guiding and teaching them.

Another video scene, this time from *Missi roti and chutney recipe made at home* Easy cooking masters and Punjabi culture, 2019, 10:22), provided further evidence of early socialisation through the passing of cooking knowledge from the older women of the family to the youngest. In this video, three women were cooking on an open fire stove in their backyard. The cooking area was slightly elevated with a mosaic style rustic stone slab distinguishing it from the rest of the area, and acting as an invisible fence, symbolically restricting the women within it. Woman 2 was seen adjusting the fire in the stove and Woman 3 was rolling and cooking the flatbread, when a young girl of around 13 years walked in and sat beside Woman 1. Woman 1 then talked her through some ingredients that were being used in the dish. The girl listened obediently, gently nodding her head, to show her understanding, and acceptance of her social role within the family.

#### ***4.4.2 Gender roles and rituals learned***

A scene from the video *Punjabi women making sarso ka saag and makki ki roti recipe* (North Indian cooking, 2019, 23:31), showed a way to introduce young girls to domestic socialisation. Girls are introduced to their domesticated gender roles from an early age by being in an environment where women between the ages of 18 and 55 in their family abide by the prescribed domestic norms and roles. In this video, two women were cooking and were then joined by a little girl around the age of six, who sat beside them and observed them cook. The two women, one in her early 30s and one in her 60s, were cooking in their front yard in an area enclosed by a low cement wall. The wall acts as a physical barrier that confined the women within that space, indicating their place in the kitchen. The young girl sat and observed the two women cook for a while, her expressions showing partial interest in what the women were doing, and partial boredom, which suggests a process of familiarisation with the tasks that are expected of her in the social setting of her family.

In addition to introducing girls to domestic routines at a young age, the people of North India demonstrates unequal food distribution processes among the genders. It is reflected in specific behaviours such as young girls serving themselves less food than that served to young boys, or shying away from second helpings. This practice of disproportionate food allocation was seen in the video *Missi roti and chutney recipe made at home* (Easy cooking masters and Punjabi culture, 2019, 10:22), where woman 3 was serving chutney along with flatbreads on the plates placed in front of the two children, a girl around the age of 13 and a boy around the same age. As Woman 3 extended her hand to serve the girl more food, the girl subtly gestured to her with a hand motion to serve her only a little, to which Woman 3 obliged. The little girl's facial expressions and body language reflected her hesitation to take a bigger portion of food. These reactions indicate her internalised reactions to social conditioning where women take the lesser portion of food when a male, regardless of age, is present. Thus she adhered to the gendered social norms.

#### ***4.4.3 Rituals of subservience and subordination learned***

The videos revealed that when young girls are introduced to a domestic environment learned behaviours are reflected in their individual actions, words, and interactions with members of the family and wider society, reinforcing the idea that the practices of subservience and subordination are rituals that are deeply rooted in the culture. An example of this was found in the video *Village people evening daily routine* (Easy

cooking masters and Punjabi culture, 2019, 13:03), in which a teenage girl around the age of 16 and a woman in her 30s were peeling vegetables and cooking together. The teenaged girl was sitting on a bedstead when an older woman walked up to her, and in a harsh tone, asked for some vegetables to peel. The older woman had her head covered, indicating her marital status and age; in a family hierarchy, the older women have authority over the younger women and girls. The demanding yet emotionless tone of the woman's voice indicates the habitual ways of addressing young girls and women in a harsh way in a social environment. The subdued behaviour and the young girls' compliance shows they are socially conditioned and expected to follow commands from elder women in their family and community.

#### ***4.4.4 Hard domestic labour for women***

It is a tradition in North Indian culture to prepare food from raw materials, as seen in the videos of women preparing food such as butter. The practice of having butter made by the women of the house represents the labour women put into their daily chores. A scene from *Swear di hajri di roti* (Easy cooking masters and Punjabi culture, 2019, 10:02), showed a woman in her late 50s preparing fresh butter at home by churning it with a small electric churner, and in the video *Jatt village women making methi ka paratha* (Real Bharat, 2019, 13:19), a woman in her mid-30s was seen plucking fresh vegetables from the family farm. She spent over an hour cleaning the vegetables before beginning the cooking process. These videos depict how women in rural environments spend long hours laboriously preparing meals with fresh raw ingredients instead of purchasing ready made goods at a store. The domestic roles and responsibilities of women are monotonous and are socially expected gendered roles.

#### ***4.4.5 Summary***

Women have domestic roles that are hard, often unacknowledged, and learnt from a young age by observing their elders. The videos highlight this, showing women carrying out laborious domestic tasks. These activities are a manifestation of the gendered expectations learnt by women in their rural North Indian environments.

#### ***4.4.6 Discussion***

India is strongly influenced by gender roles and gender inequality has its roots in the social and cultural stratification of roles and responsibilities assigned to men and women, and the different values ascribed to these roles (Gupta & Yesudian, 2006). In the videos, men were responsible for working outside the home, gaining a higher status than the

women, whose work it was to carry out domestic labour, which is regarded as a less valued role. The difference in the value attached to gendered roles reflects how in North India there are deeply rooted ideas about the superiority of men and the subordination of women; a woman's subordinate role is looked on as a "cultural legacy", that needs to be upheld (Dutt, 2018). This cultural legacy is upheld through the early introduction of girls to domestic socialisation.

Young girls are exposed to an environment in which women in their family abide by prescribed domestic norms and roles, and learn domesticated gender roles from an early age; these roles are communicated through individual actions, words or interactions with other members of the family. The status of Indian women is determined primarily by traditional gender hierarchy and roles (Ghosh, 2004), and there is often a clear distinction between men and women in a societal context. Women learn the domestic roles of subordination and servitude to men in the domestic sphere, because in the North Indian region, a woman's compliance is considered an important aspect of becoming a good wife and daughter-in-law (Jeffery, 2018). In some environments, older women are held in the high regard in front of young women within the family hierarchy. This influences interactions between older and younger women and how their domestic knowledge is attained. Women's positions of disempowerment are deeply rooted in the way gender roles, identities and relations are conceived by households, communities and society at large (Gupta & Yesudian, 2006).

#### **4.5 Concluding Summary: The mechanisms of food bias**

This overarching summary brings together the key points from the previous discussions to reveal the mechanisms in the rural food cycle that perpetuate gendered food bias.

This study aimed to explore the gendered food bias within a central rural North Indian household and the three major themes that emerged in the findings were: 1) the importance of the male dominated family hierarchy, 2) roles of service for women, built on early socialisation of girls, and 3) traditional norms of behaviour.

The key points of the male dominated family hierarchy were that men as breadwinners in Indian society, so accrue a higher status in the family. Men held authority over all the women in the family regardless of age or relationship with them. Women learned to be



obedient to the needs of the men, influenced by authoritarian behaviour such as demanding food, tone of voice and body language, which exhibits entitled behaviour.

The key point that emerged from roles of service for women were that there is significant emphasis on the early socialisation of young girls, who were educated in domestic chores and taught to respect a man's authority over them. The privileged behaviour of men is evident through the gendered bias of food distribution, as the man at the head of the household eats first, followed by the rest of the men and boys, with women and girls eat last, often having smaller portions than the men, who have more food if they wish.

Lastly, the key point to emerge from the traditional norms of behaviour was that the early socialisation of women is key for them to learn their gender roles. These gender roles take the form of food preparation and servitude, as in North Indian rural communities it is important that young women learn these skills and be subordinate in order to be seen as good wives. The findings showed that these roles involve hard labour for many hours with little or no acknowledgement, but are instinctive to the young women who undertake these activities. In the rural food cycle of the gendered mechanisms of production, service and consumption perpetuate food bias that disadvantages women and privileges men in North Indian society (Figure. 5).

Table two explains the various mechanisms within the rural food cycle, the activities included within each mechanism, and the effect they have on the socio-cultural environment.



*Figure 5: The rural food cycle*

Table 2: The food cycle, activities, and effects on gender roles in households

<b>Mechanisms in the food cycle</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>
Food Sourcing	Gathering food from family farms or buying from markets  Milking cows and buffalos	Hard domestic labour for women
Food Preparation	Making ingredients from raw materials: butter, cottage cheese etc.  Cooking food and preparing drinks such as buttermilk.	Early domestic socialisation of women and girls  Gender roles and rituals are learned and transmitted
Food Service	Plating and serving food to family members	Women are caretakers of men and children  Men and boys are served before women and girls
Food Consumption	Eating food that is prepared and served	Male head eats first  Behaviours reflecting male authority and entitlement  Older women have authority over younger women
Food Clean-up	Clearing out plates and other utensils after eating	Rituals of subservience and subordination are learned

## **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION**

### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this final chapter the aims and objectives of the research are presented, along with key findings. The theoretical and practical implications that can be drawn from the study are discussed, and the limitations faced in the research are outlined. Recommendations for future research are given, and some concluding remarks on the overall study.

### **5.2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES REVISITED**

The aim of this study was to answer the question, “what are the underlying reasons behind the bias in food distribution among genders in central North Indian rural homes?” This was answered as follows:

- The family structure and hierarchy pushes women to the lower end of the family organisation.
- The social role for women to be the caretakers of the household pressures them into ignoring their own nutritional needs.
- The traditional norms of behaviour dictate the rural food bias that privileges men and penalises women.

The other research question was, “what are the mechanisms that perpetuate this bias?”

This was answered as follows:

- The rural food cycle consists of five sets of mechanisms that encourage the food bias with food service and food consumption being the two most important ones. Food consumption and service act as tools of bias, as the activities included in them, and their effects, negatively affect women and girls.

A qualitative feminist methodology was used in the study, as a feminist perspective works from the assumption that women’s disadvantage is a consequence of their societal position as women (Kumra et al., 2014). This has a significant link to the theoretical implications of this study: by undertaking an investigation of the socio-cultural aspects of a gendered food bias, the study assists in understanding the workings of a gendered society as well as the mechanisms that perpetuate food bias among genders in central rural North India. The method used in this study was thematic analysis, as this method is

used for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns or themes within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As this study looked at various factors that affected and facilitated a gendered food bias in central North Indian homes, recognising themes within the data helped establish important factors that underlined social issues. The data were collected from YouTube videos; three major themes emerged: family hierarchy, roles of service for women, and traditional norms of behaviour. These themes responded to the research questions as well as correlate with the literature on the topic.

### **5.3 THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS**

This study provides new perspectives on the food bias that occurs in rural North Indian societies. A wide range of literature looking into food bias from a nutritional perspective exists. However, this study introduces the notion that the mechanisms that preserve food bias against women in North Indian society are processes that are comparable to gendered organisational structures (Calas et., all, 2013), that preserve male privilege and discriminate against women. These structures result in lower rewards and poorer job conditions for women compared to those for men. As in organisational life, in North Indian society, the cultural, social and traditional norms all reflect gendered behaviours affecting men and women differently: men are affected positively whereas the women face negative repercussions that reduce the wellbeing of women and girls.

By investigating the socio-cultural aspects of a gendered food bias reflected by daily practices, this study provides an important contribution that assists in understanding the workings of a gendered society as well as the daily activities, reasons, and mechanisms that perpetuate a food bias among genders in central rural North India. This research provides a new lens to view food bias that warrants further investigation.

### **5.4 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS**

The significance of this research is that it exactly pinpoints the socio-cultural mechanisms that need to be addressed in order to reduce food bias among genders in rural North India. It may also provide some practical insights for local government authorities in the North Indian communities and benefit women's overall health and well-being. This study showed that there are a number of socio-cultural mechanisms that further the food bias against women, affecting their health and well-being. Malnutrition is evident in women and girls in poor households, and gender is the most important issue (Ramachandran, 2006). Women and girls are often overlooked in terms of food and nutrition, leading to a serious health issues.

The government bodies in these areas need to put initiatives in place and make an effort to educate the people and make them aware of the existent bias and how it affects women and girls. Girls tend to receive lower quality and less expensive food, such as grains rather than milk and fat (Shaikh et al., 2016). This food allocation practice should be supervised using checks on the nutritional health of women and girls, while also starting a conversation about food and nutrition.

Although it is understood that a culture cannot be changed overnight and that gendered structures and practices in North India are embedded in enduring social norms, the government needs to consider the implications of its role on education and respond by allowing girls equal access to education, food and other resources as well as educating the village elders, men as well as women, on the repercussions of biased practices and activities and how they affect the health of women and indirectly, future generations.

### **5.5 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

There were certain limitations to this study; the main one was the small sample size. Although the data were rich, the short time period was a constraint to primary data collection. A limited number of videos were analysed for this study, however, they were able to reflect the traditions of North Indian society. Future studies using different methods such as surveys, interviews and observations would help in understanding this issue more deeply.

### **5.6 CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Food is an important part of the human culture and society that reflects our backgrounds and identities. It is an important element for the functioning of life, so access should not be mediated through social identities and hierarchies (Pradhan & Rao, 2018). As the researcher in this study, I believe that a bias in the service or consumption of food based on gender or any other factor is unfair and a violation of human rights. In this study, I hope to have highlighted the factors that encourage a gender food bias and encourage a much needed conversation towards a positive change based on my research.

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