

Simran Sethi, *Bread Wine Chocolate: The Slow Loss of the Foods We Love*, (HarperOne: USA, November 2015), Price: Rs. 510, ISBN: 9780061581076

– **Shimoli Pandya**

BA, Mass Communication and Environmental Studies
School of Liberal Studies
Pandit Deendyal Petroleum University
Gujarat

Award-winning journalist Simran Sethi says that “this is a book about food, but it really is a book about love.” Evidence of this can be found throughout the book, as we follow her on her journey towards discovering the origin of her favourite foods, which include Wine, Chocolate, Bread, Beer, Coffee and also Octopus, from plough to plate. *Bread Wine Chocolate* looks at how these different food items impact the everyday lives of people. Though we have most of these foods for pleasure, we forget the hard work that goes behind cultivating the most beautiful wines and the most exquisite chocolates. This book gives us a behind the scenes look into the story of these foods, and the role each individual, be it a farmer or a consumer or a retailer, plays in the process of creating the finished product.

After thousands of years, from being hunters and gatherers, we have evolved to a point where food means much more to us than a means for survival. It is imbibed in our culture, and each food item reflects within itself its cultural roots. Simran Sethi beautifully captures this relationship between the food items and their origins. Moreover, she sheds light on the nurturers, who if hadn’t taken great care in cultivating these different crops like cacao or vines, maybe what the world eats would have been completely different. The book also includes some of her personal accounts and interactions with the people from the food industry, and many of these passionate stories and beliefs manage to strike a chord with the reader too, for these are foods that each of us has cherished but never tried to know more about. This book urges us to dig deeper.

One of the other major topics that the author sheds light on is the loss of biodiversity. Humans have always had a tendency to lean towards uniformity. The same is true for food too. Farmers prefer to grow crops which can give them the best yield and better money, and corporations and food giants need their products to taste the same, no matter which corner of the world you buy them from. This chase for uniformity has led to an increasing amount of preference for the same foods, as a result of which, genetic biodiversity is decreasing. The author talks about different varieties of crops, including fruits and vegetables, which are now at risk. Additionally, the book talks about how due to planting the same crop, and not allowing different varieties to grow, we are moving towards a world where fewer varieties exist, extinction is common.

A very interesting point that the author mentions here is that of monoculture. Growing the same crops on the same land, year after year, is more harmful than beneficial, as it takes away the soil nutrients and put the crop at a greater risk of failure or being affected by an epidemic. The opening lines on the cover describe what the author is trying to say perfectly,

what we do know is that food is beginning to look and taste the same, whether you're strolling through a San Francisco farmers market, at a Midwestern potluck – or a McDonald's in India. Ninety-five percent of the world's calories now come from only 30 species, and a closer look at America's cornucopia of grocery store options reveals that our foods are primarily made up of only corn, wheat, rice, palm oil, and soybeans. Food itself – the most delicious, diverse varieties of food – is being lost, slowly and irrevocably.

The book is divided into seven main sections, the first of which focuses on biodiversity and taste, and the subsequent sections each centre on Wine, Chocolate, Coffee, Beer, Bread and Octopus respectively. We are transported to the vineyards of California, and through the next few pages, it is evident that sometimes, local foods can lead to a better and an enriching experience. In this section the author meets winemakers and restaurant owners, who believe in the power of the grape, and who, through great care have chosen the best varieties of grapes over the years to make wine that is not just a part of the main uniform product, but something which is rich in flavour and 'terroir'.

Chocolate is one of the world's most beloved food items, but very few know where it actually comes from. The next section takes us on a fascinating journey to the Cacao plantations in Ecuador, where the plants are harvested, turned into cocoa and finally, chocolate as we know it. The transforming power of coffee, bread and all other food items shouldn't be underestimated because it is important

to recognise that culture and food are intertwined, and it has always been that way. Towards the end of the book are reader-friendly guides on tasting chocolates, wine, coffee, bread, beer and octopus, and the author has also included flavour and aroma wheels to give the reader a deeper insight into tasting and savouring these wonderful delicacies.

Sethi expresses that there are many things that can be done, to save the foods that we love. Taking an active interest in what you are eating and where it comes from is one of them. Stepping out of one's comfort zone and looking for new options is another. She points out that it is the small industries, and not the big ones, which are playing an instrumental role in promoting diversity. She adds that this loss of diversity is a worldwide phenomenon and has potential to transform how we eat, and what we eat forever.