

# Example of memoir of food and life term paper

[Food & Diet](#), [Cooking](#)



Remembering life through tastes. This seems to be the essence of “ Climbing the Mango trees - A Memoir of a Childhood Indian”. Traditionalism and local Indian events are shared through the pages of this book, which creates the impression of a happy, normal family, a family much entrenched in the Indian values. Nevertheless, as in any family, first of all, the one presented here, the author’s family displays feelings of love, protection, and sharing among each other. For any of these feelings, and many others that exhibit out of this book, the author found associations with different food spices of dishes.

The story evokes with pleasure some far away moments, which are remembered as if it just happened. Jeffrey surprises in details the serenity of the Indian dinners, where around 40 people would gather to table to share food and good joy, quality moments with all the members of the large family. She surprises the local charm of her village and illustrates the specific Indian humor:

“ My grandfather, apparently, teased my father, saying that he should have named me ‘ Menbhari’, or ‘ I am sated’, instead I was already the fifth child. But my father continued to procreate and I was left with honey on my palate and my deepest soul” (Jeffrey 3).

This image is a representation of the particularity of the Indian tradition. The author selected a very traditional event in the Indians’ family, namely the selection of the name for the child, in order to associate it with the symbol of her passion - the taste. The name that her father has chosen for her symbolizes her connection with a life full of flavor. Likewise, as in the Indian tradition, the name is not solely a representation of one’s personality, but

also a gift from above and a prophecy.

There can be easily felt the aromas of winter in New Delhi India from Jeffrey's recipes. The ingredients that she reminds of, leads the reader to a family gathering atmosphere, where everybody is involved in preparing the Christmas dishes or just a regular luscious winter dinner. The Fenugreek greens specialty mixed with carrots or potatoes clearly create a distinct specialty that identifies not solely a specific culture, but from the manner that it is described, it identifies the aroma of a family.

This conducts to an image of intimacy, of singular feelings felt in a unique setting, the one of Jeffrey's family, which is just like any other traditional family, sharing dinner, house, thoughts, feelings, and priceless moments. However, there are specific indications in the author's recipes that reflect the Indian food culture: " What most Indians do - and this I have learned from the generation of Indians that came west before me - is to use decent amount of cilantro as a substitute ( ) All Indian grocers carry packages labeled ' dried fenugreek leaves' or ' kasoori methi'" (Jeffrey 266).

Through the usage of specific aromas and flavors, through the described compositions, condiments and combinations, plus the indications for cooking in the Indian style, the book identifies with the Indian culture. Through the emotions that it carries in every ingredient, through the connections that it creates with every dish presented in the book, through the associations with a certain event or tradition, the book identifies with a specific family, belonging to Indian nationality.

Based on Jeffrey's memoire, the reader of " Climbing the mango trees - A Memoir of a Childhood in India" can sense not only the homey atmosphere of

an Indian family, but also the vivid activity, the fuss and the agitation of the Indian bazaars or restaurants. One can practically perceive and identify mentally the bustle of these places, mixed with different scents that represent various dishes or snacks. She talks about the samosas that are the Indian version of the hamburgers, which were served in the Indian bazaars. The author also touches the cultural interaction subject through her story, by telling how some of the Indian dishes were inspired from other cultures. As such, the reader learns that Samosas is a “savory pastries that came to India, probably from Iraq, as the early as the tenth century A. D” (Jeffrey, page).

For Chinese, meals represent also a family activity, and in our family we used to have three meals per day, where we all gathered as for a continuous and ongoing ritual. As our parents were cooking, mostly my dad, who was the captain of the oven, me and my brothers were hanging around in the kitchen, watching them or playing among ourselves. Sometimes our parents used to give us small responsibilities, just to teach us with the habit of cooking and of staying in the kitchen. These would include washing the vegetables, extracting the seeds from fruits, or chopping them. In China, cooking is a tradition that is transmitted from generation to generation within the household.

We used to look at our father with admiration, watching him in control of the situation, very passionate about what he cooked, regardless how tired he was after coming home from work. This was like a relaxation for him and for us, when our father cooked and we are all together, there were some careless moments and we only thought that this was normal, as that was the

only reality that we knew, in the comfort of our pleasant home.

We used to sit at a big round table, nicely prepared and the setting of the table, combined with the mixed flavors of sichuan pepper, rice vinegar, or peanut sauce – to name a few – and the general atmosphere of our household would give even more taste to our food.

When we had guests at the table, the setting was a little more complex, but the table was definitely more occupied with various other dishes than the ones we usually had. When we welcomed visitors, regardless the occasions, the meals would become even more protocolled, in terms of arrangement and logistics of food and drinks. However, the homey atmosphere was still there and our guests usually felt as home.

The food portions are not big, but they are very varied. When cooking, we usually cook big portions for the entire family and prepare enough to eat another time also. However, when eating we take small bites from all the dishes that we prepare and we end up being saturated easily. Some may say that this is the secret of the Chinese's silhouette.

For Europeans, Americans or Australians or Africans there is not so easy to adapt to the Chinese eating style, because they have their own style, of eating with the fork (whereas we, in China, traditionally eat with the chopsticks) and this does not help their metabolism when tasting various dishes. Many Europeans or Americans that I know, who moved to China, or stayed here for a longer period, gained in weight.

Compared to Jeffrey's book about her food memoires, I would say that she has the advantage and the ability of associating the authentic Indian dishes with local values and traditions because of a good memory and because of a

natural writing talent, plus a true passion for cooking, which resides from her recipes.

Although I remember most of the dishes that I would have in childhood and I can create associations with Chinese traditions and local events, I cannot reproduce the recipes with such precision and with the hints that Jeffrey gives to her readers.

Although I am not an expert in describing recipes, I can tell one thing for sure: in China everything can constitute a dinner and can look delicious. Duck head? Half cooked fish? Goat genital soup? Scorpions or snakes? You would better not act surprised of these unusual dishes, as they are considered typical in the Chinese restaurants.

However, while these discussions about food might reflect a certain aspect of the Chinese society, the middle life family with a middle income per family, there must not be forgotten that China is in fact a complex country, wherein the poverty rates are extremely high and people here confront famine as one of the main social dangers. For these people the selection of food is not an option and the variety of dishes at the table can be just a fantastic concept. Regarding the specificity of the Chinese cuisine, on the other hand, there are several aspects that make the food to smell, taste and feel Chinese. As such, I am an adept of the dried products, before cooking them. Of course, now they can be found in the canned versions, but the condiments used for conserving them do not really advantage the products. However, in the classical Chinese version, the drying the products before cooking them (different kinds of meat, seafood, or fruits and vegetables) makes them more pronounced in taste. They gain an extra richness when they are cooked.

Cooking in the wok allows several typical Chinese specialties to be prepared, because it favors specific techniques that give the food a certain Chinese flavor. Pouring just a little oil in a heated wok and mixing it with various condiments is known as the stir - frying procedure and the smell that accompanies it is glorious. Just when you think you had enough to eat, whenever you feel this fragrance in the air, you feel yourself taken away by your nostrils into a fantastic journey of spices and aromas.

It is a typicality of the Chinese food to prepare the meat steamed, adding abundance to the dish. In addition, there are those special details that makes our food look so good and to taste as it does. Cutting the cooking ingredients into small, but equal pieces implies that they will be cooked the same, each piece of ingredient having the same flavor and taste.

There is a certain exoticism of the Chinese food, which is given not solely by the manner in which the dishes are cooked, but also by the combinations of condiments or the seasonings that create the idea of China, just as specific combinations of condiments create the idea of India in Jeffrey's book. As such, the black bean sauce, the rice vinegar, seasoned with sugar, the Sichuan peppercorns (which are dried berries), fresh ginger create the authenticity of Chinese food, if prepared appropriately.

There is a specific pleasure in staying in a Chinese kitchen. Usually, cooking is an activity in itself, taking a lot of time. However, if you are in a Chinese kitchen, you are passionate about cooking and time is not an issue, as you are solely cooking for pleasure.

Unlike the tradition of eating in India, where, as Jeffrey reflected in her book, there are many families gathered at the table for eating, encompassing

around 40 persons, in my family there are usually just the members of my family who are sitting at the table. When we had visitors, or when there was a celebration in our family, there were, of course, more people at the table. In these occasions, the dishes were more sophisticated, but the food was not all on the same table, as it was when we had our regular day to day dinner or other meals. The different types of dishes were served one by one and they would usually include seasonal plates, consistent food, formed by different types of meat and soups (shark's fin is one of my favorite), and fish specialties, which ends the line of consistent foods. During meals, the grownups would serve whiskey or other types of alcohol, however not restricting to the Chinese traditional drinks.

I am now trying various other cuisines, Americans, Europeans, Africans and other Asian also. I have eaten Indian food also, but although I enjoyed most dishes that I had, I am still connected to the Chinese food. It is not only food that I have when I eat authentic Chinese food, it is an experience that I am reliving or that I am recreating.

## **Works Cited**

Jeffrey, Madhur. *Climbing the Mango Trees- A Memoir of a Childhood in India*. New york, Vintage Books, 2005. Print.