

Durban Indian Cuisine as an Instrument of Gastrodiplomacy Leverage in Tourism

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Abstract

Food is a persuasive catalytic agent for bringing people together; one of the prominent tourist attractions; and a powerful tool for achieving strategic diplomatic goals. This conceptual paper discusses the Durban Indian cuisine as a potential instrument of gastrodiplomacy, channelized through tourism. In gastrodiplomacy, food and diplomacy are the main constituents which are entwined in creating and upholding a national brand, such that each of these dimensions through a cumulative appreciation each of these components. In this regard, Durban, a city in South Africa, recently selected as one of the top places for culinary tourism, can wisely use this gastronomic excellence for the benefits of tourism development. Similarly, being a necessary ingredient of Indianess in Durban, ethnic cuisine can be utilized to leverage India's gastrodiplomacy efforts in the African region. This study proposes collaborative action plans for both Indian and South African governments to implement gastrodiplomacy. In that order, it broadens the current understanding of the geopolitics of tourism by the application of food and diplomacy.

Keywords: South African Tourism, Culinary Tourism, Gastronomy, National Identity

"In what we choose to eat, we express who we are and where we come from... cross-culturally, food is an invaluable tool for communicating emotional messages..."
(Trapido, 2008: III-IV)

Channelling gastrodiplomacy through culinary tourism

A key marketing point of South Africa as a tourist destination is its collection of incredible natural resources within a short radius. Nowadays, many several potential resources are adding to this list such as plantation tourism, food tourism, art tourism, and heritage tourism. Moreover, Durban in South Africa has been selected as one of the best culinary tourism destinations in the world (Steinmetz, 2018). For Steinmetz (2018) "having been named as the world's best food city Durban in South Africa stands out as a must-visit destination for the world's foodies. Restaurants such as The Test Kitchen have enjoyed top recognition, being ranked in the top 30 restaurants in the world" (Steinmetz, 2018: 1). South Africa can leverage this interest to market itself as the culinary tourism destination and exploit the burgeoning market of culinary tourism. Durban is famous for Durban Indian Cuisine, it is "a hybrid of varying cooking techniques from more than one region of India which combined with locally available ingredients and localized versions of spices" (Govender-Ypma, 2018: 1). Ethnic restaurants are a door to that ethnic community's culture and identity. Similarly, revenue from food services is undeniably a substantial income for governments. The growing interest in Durban Indian Cuisine encourages the Indian ethnic restaurant sector in Durban of diaspora and tourism development (Singh & Bhoola, 2018).



However, it is not an effortless task to develop and promote culinary tourism attractions. It required long-term strategical planning and efforts. As a vital element of a country's cultural discourse, food is considered as a strategical tool to enhance the international image. Food, along with such factors as accommodation, transport, attractions and activities, is a fundamental and crucial element of the tourist product (Reynolds, 1992).

In this respect, gastrodiploamacy is an innovative approach that could be espoused to introduce Durban Indian cuisine to the world. Such an approach could perhaps upsurge South Africa's tourism revenue, expand its tourism sector and increase its cultural influence globally. Here, it is a hidden germ for India as well due to the wide-spread Indian diaspora in Durban. The gastrodiploamacy of India is going to flourish along with South African Tourism.

Gastrodiploamacy is a diplomatic strategy employing food as an instrument to create cross-cultural understanding and enhance international collaborations and alliance. It can be used to form trans-cultural dialogues between societies to create an avenue that fosters harmony, cooperation and compassion. Suntikul (2017) presents the potential of tourism as a gastrodiploamacy tool. For her gastrodiploamacy means “the realm of policies and practices by which both states and non-state actors seek to engender positive associations with a national brand among foreign publics, using the channels through which tourists or potential tourists come into contact with the national cuisine” (Suntikul, 2017: 14). In this sense, different ethnic restaurants are vital players in the introduction and familiarisation of a country's cuisine along with diaspora. Suntikul (2017) tags these ethnic restaurants as contact zones of gastrodiploamacy, as they play complex roles, planning people for tourism, making them more likely to visit, more likely to undertake the nearby nourishment, and more likely to pick up an appreciation for the culture, based on the contact theory that expanding contact breeds expanding acknowledgement. However, the action levels and intensity depend on many factors such as the number of customers, location, authenticity and quality of food served. Since, matters of food in tourism can be considered as a double-sided sword, which can have both assured and harmful influence. Thus, to formulate a delicious gastrodiploamacy strategy, the current proportion of ingredients are essential or else it will ruin the whole efforts.

Tourism as a powerful tool for gastrodiploamacy could be more productive while it is subtle and decisive. Indeed, food is an integral part of tourism experience, conceivably food itself a tourist's motivation; and the dining outlets such as restaurants can be the key contact zones of people to people (P2P) diploamacy. In the same way, overseas ethnic restaurants are identified as the ambassadors of a county's cuisine (Reynolds, 2012; Rockower, 2012; Suntikul, 2017). There are two levels of diploamacy in action. Firstly, ethnic restaurants in a tourist's home country are the primary source of contact of the national culinary brand, where they may regularly visit (Zhang, 2015). Secondly, the ethnic restaurants as a foodscape of a tourist destination and tourist's experience those foods while travelling to that place. Arguably, this could be more attractive and persuasive 'soft diploamacy' for a national culinary brand. However, this area remains under-researched in the context of gastrodiploamacy in tourism (Suntikul, 2017).

Some studies (Ndlovu & Ojong, 2018; Singh & Bhoola, 2016) identified the crucial role of Indian cuisine in Durban tourism. This is mainly because of the growing Indian diaspora in the region. In either case, the ethnic Indian restaurants in Durban can act as an emissary of gastrodiploamacy for Indian culture. Similarly, this could be a potential avenue of government to government (G2G) diploamacy. Therefore, this conceptual paper aims to explore Durban Indian restaurants as an effective tool for gastrodiploamacy in the milieu world's best food city and as a multi-visited destination in Africa.

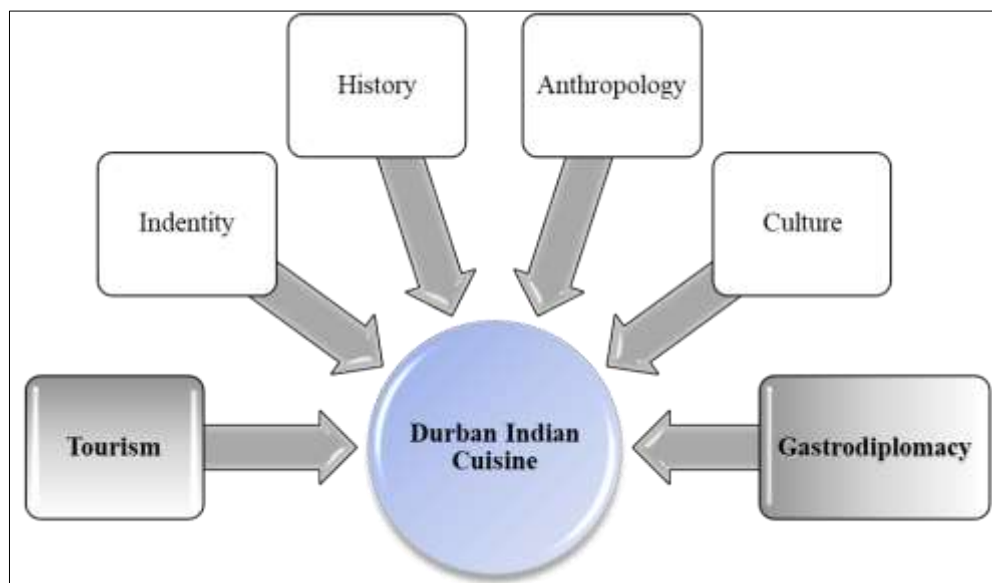


Figure1: Conceptualising gastrodiplomacy in tourism for India and South Africa

Contextualizing soft power, tourism and food

Nye (2008: 3) defined soft power as “a country’s ability to influence another country’s behaviour or the ability to shape what others want without using hard or coercive power, which is the ability to change what others do”. In other terms, soft power is the cultural power of a nation to attract the international population. Being an intangible, subtle and interpretive concept, soft power articulates through a channel or zones of contact. Ooi (2015) identifies tourism as the most capable channel for broadcasting a destination’s power of attractions to a wide range of the global population in an effective way. Nevertheless, Vuving (2009) and Gallarotti (2011) warn about the fragile line of differentiation between soft power and propaganda. Anything breaking these boundaries deliberately or accidentally turns out to be propaganda rather than the power of attraction. Perhaps, tourism as a platform of soft power exhibition is instead (mis)interpreted as a purposeful publicity build-up due to the excessive marketing activities by various stakeholders. Though, there are some cultural attractions of the place insinuating and implied decisive yet authoritative in action. Food is an example of such kind of tourist attraction, which has competent potential to be a cultural weapon. Also “food can function as a non-threatening way to gain favour among and make a connection with a foreign audience” (Wilson, 2011: 3) therefore it is widely appreciated as a soft power currency

According to Reynolds (2012), food can be symbolized in numerous ways — a sterile item, or a thing of consumption that has valid and social imagery to the title. The last-mentioned of these conceptualizations (the cultural-symbolic definition of food), is the essential understanding of food when it is utilized as an issue to carry an actor’s soft power. The transmission of soft power occurs when the food translates its cultural values to the consumers (tourists). Chapple-Sokol (2013: 161) further explains the use of food or cuisine as a method to build cross-cultural communication with the hope of improving interaction and cooperation between people, which has known us, people, to people (P2P) diplomacy. Food as an essential element of human existence has always played a significant part in international relationships and ambassadorial practice from prehistoric times. Besides it is being used as a means to exert power, to convey one’s own history, personality and signals that transmit affection or enmity (Lusa & Jakešević, 2017).

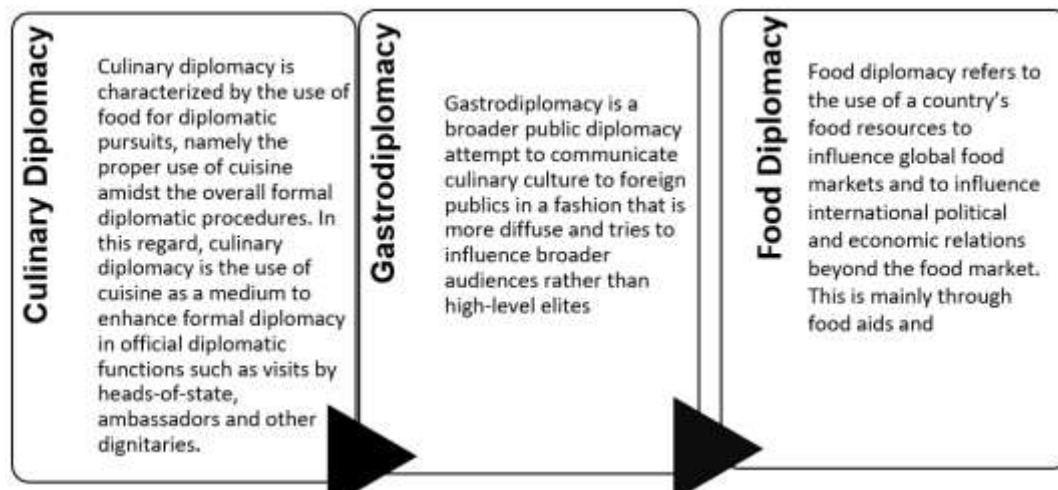


Figure 2: Contextualizing food and diplomacies (Source: Rockower, 2012)

Food as a central element of culture and identity, plays a premeditated role in the international arena. Globalization has alleviated the solid borders between national and international; global and local through an increased level of interaction and exchange. Contextually, the national identity icons need to be preserved from the undeniable cross-cultural influences to keep them as the national assets. For Chapple-Sokol (2017:108) “gastro nationalism appears as a persistent effort to maintain a claim over specific types of food or drinks, the specificity of one nations’ flavours and tastes or culinary experiences, offering them at the same time, under that national etiquette, to the global market.

Alhinnawi (2011) positions food as a vital tool in developing cultural understanding, and in turn, interrupting down traditional barricades by offering insight into an unfamiliar culture. Many countries are actively involved in the promotion of their national cuisines. For example, South Korea – Kimchi; Japan – Washoku; Taiwan - a Gourmet Taiwan plan; France - gastronomic meal of the French. However, this trend is not found in Indo-African regions. This is somewhat surprising that for both India and South Africa – two countries with distinctive world-famous globally spread cuisine than any other countries listed above. This study conceptualized Durban Indian cuisine as a venue of both people to people (P2P) and government to government (G2G) diplomacy tool to enhance the gastrodiplomacy potential of both countries.

The history of Durban cuisine

The history of Durban curries linked back to the colonial nostalgia shared by both South Africa and India. In the late 18 centuries, Indians were taken into South African by the British as the low-level labourers for their sugar cane plantations, railways, fishing and boating industries. Centuries later Indian diaspora has become one of the prominent presences in the Durban city, perhaps the largest homogenous Indian diaspora abroad. Undeniably, the food culture was also shipped from various parts of India to Durban city. Traders, travellers and businesspeople helped the diaspora in the transformation by sending the ingredients like spices and traditional utensils.

The labourers were promised rations of rice, dhal [dal] (yellow split peas), salted fish and oil, according to a legal notice from 1874, but some ingredients, including rice, were not available at times. And just as masalas and spice blends were adjusted, food was modified based on circumstance. Maize (hominy) was chipped into rice; coconuts were scarce and reserved only for symbolic ceremonies, not for cooking like it is in Tamil Nadu; cheap



vegetable oil replaced ghee, coconut, and mustard oils; sour porridge was prepared with locally available maize meal instead of rice (Govender-Ypma, 2018:1)

After several ‘metamorphosis’ and cross-cultural changes, and the way it became intertwined with the South African cuisines, which was cultured and nurtured by the native Zulu society. Durban curries have become one of the most popular dishes not only with domestic travellers but also with international tourists. Contextually, ethnic Indian restaurants (contact zones) are the apostles of the being and becoming Indianess in the food tourism sector there. In gastrodiploacy, these contact zones are potent tools for cross-cultural understanding and praise. Indian cuisines are also famous for its multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-regional varieties. Therefore, Thussu (2013) highlighted Indian cuisines as an effective strategy for Indian diplomacy to circulate the richness of Indian culture.

The historical importance of Durban Indian cuisine is also beneficial to the African ethnic cuisines, which have influenced the contemporary fusion of foods. Since the two countries passed through severe hardship due to colonization and mutual support for their freedom movements, this harmony should need to exploit for their future endanger. Durban Indian Food’s existence centres on reminiscence, which is the critical diplomatic showground to enhance Indian perhaps South African vibrant cultural diplomacy through the stomach.

Durban – a significant location for Indian diplomacy

Durban is a strategic locality not only due to the more significant number of Indians but also due to its symbolic significance in the history of India–South Africa relationship. According to the consulate general of India (2020:1) “the South African Indian origin community numbers are around 1.6 million and constitute about 3% of South Africa’s total population. About 80% of the Indian community living in the province of KwaZulu Natal, about 15% in the Gauteng (previously Transvaal) area and the remaining 5% in Cape Town. South Africans of Indian origin are well-represented in Government, business, media, legal and other spheres”. Inter-provincial movement of Indians has been circumscribed, and this may be one of the reasons for the Durban-based accumulation. Similarly, Dickinson (2015:83) also recognizes Indian strategic importance’s for Durban as it has long been “a fluid milieu of Indian cultural and religious diaspora organizations, radio stations, newspapers and broadcasters and entrepreneurs”.

Furthermore, Durban is an essential location in the history of India. From here, Mahatma Gandhi — the father of the nation, began the Indian resistance campaign against apartheid in South Africa. He boarded the train the Pietermaritzburg, which lead to the famous Gandhian ‘non-violent Satyagraha movement’— the non-violent weapon for Indians in their freedom struggles (Dickinson, 2015). South Africa’s strive for liberation is pretty much like the Indian freedom movement. Both nations were under the British empire; both agonized racial discriminations.

Currently, Indian council for cultural relations (ICCR) and the consulate general of India (CGI) in Durban, together play an active role in promoting the government to government (G2G) and government to people (G2P) diplomatic programmes by incorporating several cultural functions (see Figure 3). Which indeed, tightens the bilateral relationship between the countries. In this regard, Durban Indian Cuisine, could a resourceful tool for both nations.



Figure 3: A Multi linguistic Music Concert in February 2019 (Source: CGI, 2020)

There are many significant bilateral associations between South Africa and India, with the predominant areas being Commercial & Economic Relations; BRICS related activities, CEO's Forum; and talents development programs like study exchange and skill development. For cultural diplomacy initiatives, “an intensive programme of cultural exchanges is organized throughout South Africa, including scholarships for South African nationals. In addition to such cultural programming, a ‘Shared Histories’ Festival organized as a public-private partnership is also organized. It held its eleventh edition in 2017 in Johannesburg” (CGI, 2020: 1). Moreover, international festivals and participation activities are flourishing between the countries. However, both governments are not actively promoting the gastronomic advantages of Durban cuisine. Though, India — a country with vast potential for gastrodiplomacy through tourism still not addressing it properly (Rockower, 2012). The following part of this conceptual paper attempts to demonstrate how tourism can be used as a strategical tool to enhance gastrodiplomacy through the famous Durban Indian cuisine.

Developing a gastrodiplomacy strategy through tourism as an ‘Indo-South African’ collaboration

Rockower (2012: 234) defines gastrodiplomacy “as the act of winning hearts and minds through stomachs” by raising national brand awareness through a country’s culinary enchantments. He further explains gastrodiplomacy as a fusion of public diplomacy that blends cultural diplomacy, food diplomacy and national branding to make intercontinental culture accessible to taste and touch. Gastrodiplomacy familiarises culture through more established contact points. This part of gastrodiplomacy revolved around daily people to people engagement (P2P) and interactions to deliver how food is used to silhouette and develop insights and empathy.

In this case of Durban Indian Cuisine, there is a well-established network of ethnic restaurants, and community corporation, especially the Indian diaspora community, lives in Durban areas. It is considering this as the main advantages for South African tourism initiatives. It could be recommended the Government initiatives to attract international tourists to the destination through gastrodiplomacy tools such as food festivals, campaigns, and events. Building Durban’s multinational, multi-cuisine identity must be a merged effort for various departments of International affairs, tourism ministry and cultural department of both Indian and South African governments. Also, it needs the coordination of multiple stakeholders, both private and public, national and international.

Effective marketing strategies and public relation plans are fundamental actions for making increased awareness and temptation for a destination’s culinary acquaintance. Therefore, it is suggested for collaboration of food writers (bloggers, writers, travel agents) to build-up a unique, innovative culinary platform for Durban Indian Cuisine and to publicize it in their appropriate circles. Moreover, a dedicated section for the culinary attractions is significant in the national tourism promotional activities.

For those countries, which are actively promoting their cuisine and tourism, there are some sorts of a national dish. For instance, Kimchi for South Korea; Washoku for Japan; Pad Thai for Thailand; Bacalhau for Portugal. However, for India, there is no intentional gastrodiplomacy (projected drawback) activities being conducted compared to its Asian counterparts. Even though, for Indian foods like Samosa, Idly, Dosa, Chicken Tikka Masala and Biryani are globally available and accessible. Indian diplomacy is commonly known as Samosa diplomacy (Rockower, 2012).

Indian authorities should take the advantages of its wide-spread international diaspora to support Durban Indian Cuisine. The ethnic restaurants in the potential market of South African tourism, must be developed as the tourist information centres for Durban. Overseas, South African and Indian ethnic restaurants as the cultural hot spots, need to take natives to display the traditional culinary utensils, handicrafts and so on.

Similarly, it is crucial to make sure the availability of trained staffs specifically or these ethnic restaurants in Durban. This can be done in two ways. Firstly, with the collaboration with the Indian external affairs ministry by supplying authentic Indian chefs to South Africa. Thailand — the pioneer country successfully launched gastrodiplomacy through tourism (Global Thai), adopted this method. Secondly, by Indo-African cooperation, culinary schools can be developed. This is beneficial for the local communities as well—similar kind of study exchange program already in place with ICC

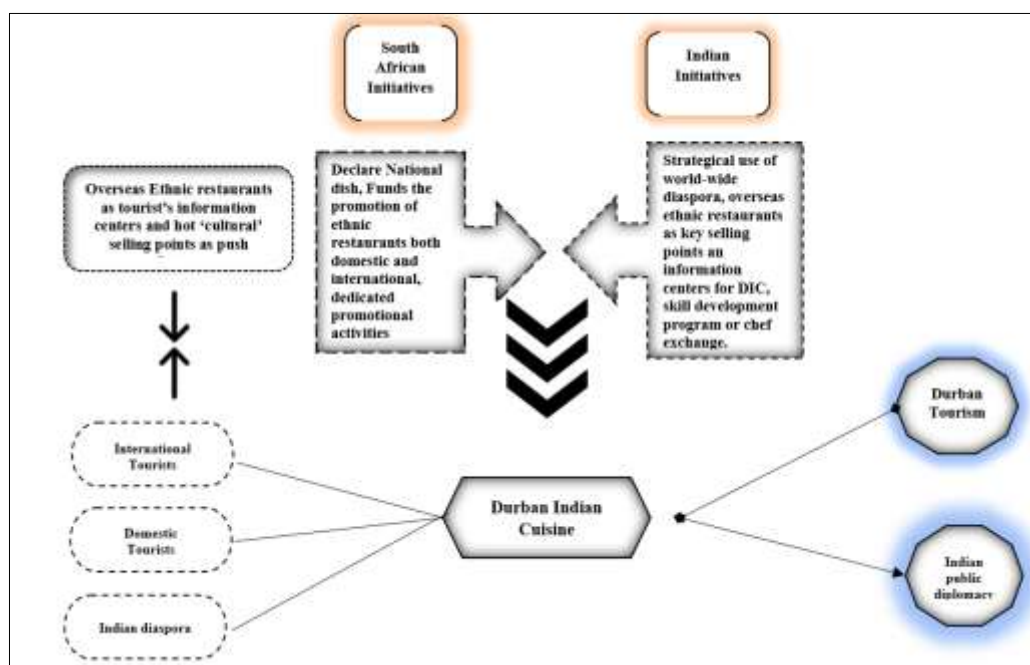


Figure 4: Intertwined action levels of food, tourism and diplomacy

Conclusion and implications

This conceptual paper offers gastrodiplomacy through tourism as a powerful tool for tourism and diplomatic potential of both South Africa and India by positioning Durban Indian



Cuisine as the centre of attraction. Gastrodiplomacy is a broader public diplomacy attempt to communicate culinary culture to foreign audiences in a more diffuse fashion and seeks to influence a wider audience rather than high-ranking elites. This can also be interpreted as a type of gastrodiplomacy when food is used to promote people-to-people interaction and enhanced cultural understanding (Rockowner, 2012). In gastrodiplomacy, food, tourism, culture and diplomacy are intertwined together to form a strategy for ‘appetizing’ element to attract international tourists. According to Nye’s (2008) third dimension of public diplomacy, gastrodiplomacy initiatives help a country “developing relations in the long-term diplomacy”. Sunkul (2017) identified tourism as a prevailing channel to broadcast gastrodiplomacy to its wider audience (international tourists). This can be done through gastrodiplomacy campaigns, overseas restaurants and events.

This article presents an innovative approach for gastrodiplomacy through Durban culinary tourism, which could be mutually beneficial for both India and South Africa. This is an example of using critical areas of attraction for the benefits destination’s benefits through the ingenious attractions. Durban Indian cuisine ethnic restaurants can act as a pull factor to enhance south African tourism, which can also significantly contribute to India’s public diplomacy. Therefore, this research suggests some practical and policy implications, which could help both to theoretical and practical understandings. Thoracically, this study enhances the current literature by providing the role of food and tourism to improve collaboration between two nations, to build-up the international image (either through tourism or public diplomacy). This could be an excellent initiative for those countries which have significant historical ties and diasporic relationships. Practically, this research opens various platforms for projecting Durban Indian cuisine to persuade hearts and minds of the foreign population. It should be achieved through the cumulative efforts of both the governments (Indian and South Africans) by strategically deploying its resources like ethnic restaurants wide-spread diaspora, gastrodiplomacy campaigns and stakeholder participation.

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