



# A PLATE OF MEMORIES WITH SPICES OF EMOTION: EXPLORING FOOD, FEELINGS AND MEMORY IN IMTIAZ DHARKERS AT *THE LAHORE KARHAI*

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**Abstract :** This article examines the interrelated themes of food, memory, and emotion in Imtiaz Dharker's poem *At the Lahore Karhai*. The poem shows that food is more than just a way to get energy; it is also a strong cultural and emotional symbol. Dharker uses the traditional Lahore karhai dish to show how food can hold the essence of home, identity, and belonging. The poem vividly describes how taste, smell, and sound can bring back memories that are both personal and shared. The poet's connection to the lively culture and traditions of Lahore is brought back to life by food. The article goes on to talk about how nostalgia is the main emotional tone in the poem, showing how the poet misses home and is emotionally connected to her roots. It also stresses how food can make people feel comfortable, warm, and connected to each other, showing that meals are shared experiences that bring people closer together. The poem is also talked about in the context of migration and diaspora, where traditional food connects the past and the present, and the poet with her cultural roots. In the end, the poem shows that food is a way to remember and feel things, keeping identity across time and space.

**Index Terms** - Food and Literature, Memory, Emotion, Nostalgia, Cultural Identity, Homeland, Belonging, Diaspora, Migration, Sensory Imagery, Pakistani Culture, Food Symbolism.

## Introduction

Food is not just something we need to live; it is also a strong symbol of culture, identity, and feelings. In literature, food is often more than just taste and nutrition; it is a way for writers to talk about memory, longing, belonging, and their own history. Imtiaz Dharker's poem "*At the Lahore Karhai*" does a great job of showing how food, memory, and emotion are all connected. The poem takes place in Lahore, a city with a rich cultural history. It uses the traditional dish "karhai" to stand for home and cultural roots. Dharker uses vivid sensory images to bring back memories and make people feel connected to food. The poem also shows nostalgia and the experience of moving, where food connects the past and the present. This article looks at how Dharker uses food to show memory and emotional connection.

Many people admire her strong poems that deal with issues like identity, culture, migration, religion, gender, memory, and social justice. Her poetry is popular with students and readers all over the world because it uses simple language but has a lot of meaning.

She was born in Lahore, Pakistan, in 1954 and grew up in Glasgow, Scotland. She then lived and worked in both India and the UK. Because she comes from a multicultural background, her poems often show how it

feels to be lost, to belong, and to have to deal with the challenges of living between different cultures. Her poetry is very much shaped by what she has been through in her own life.

Intiaz Dharker has written a number of important books of poetry. *Purdah and Other Poems*, *Postcards from God*, *The Terrorist at My Table*, and *Over the Moon* are some of her most well-known works. In addition to writing poems, she is also an artist who often uses her own drawings to add depth and meaning to her work.

### **Intiaz Dharker: A Poet of Identity and Belonging**

Intiaz Dharker is well-known for her poems that deal with issues like migration, displacement, identity, religion, gender, and cultural conflict. She was born in Lahore, Pakistan, and grew up in Glasgow, Scotland. She then lived in India and Britain. This life with people from many cultures has changed the way she writes poetry. Dharker's writing often shows what it's like to live in between countries, cultures, and identities. Her poems are full of questions about where you fit in and how memories can weigh you down.

Dharker's poetry often deals with the idea of "home" because she has lived in many different places around the world. In her work, home is not just a physical place but also an emotional and cultural place. It is something that people carry with them through language, tradition, and memories. In her poems, food often stands for home in a very strong way. Even when someone is far away from home, the smells, tastes, and rituals of cooking can make them feel at home.

In *At the Lahore Karhai*, Dharker goes back to the cultural and emotional mood of Lahore. The poem says that even though the poet may not live in the city forever, she will always remember it and its traditions. The poet's connection to her roots is shown by the Lahore karhai. Through food, she can feel a deeper sense of belonging.

People really like Dharker's poetry because it has strong social and political messages. She writes about the lives of women, their freedom, oppression, religious boundaries, and how war and violence affect people emotionally. Intiaz Dharker is a significant contemporary poet whose poetry meaningfully and inspiringly brings to light human emotions and social realities.

The title of the poem puts food in the middle. "Karhai" can mean both the dish and the cooking tool, which is a deep wok-like pan used to make rich, spicy meat curries. Karhai cooking is a part of South Asian culture that is linked to celebration, hospitality, and eating together. Lahore, famous for its street food and lively food scene, is the perfect place for this dish. By making Lahore karhai the main point of the poem, Dharker immediately links it to Pakistani culture and identity.

The Lahore karhai dish is more than just good food. It shows a way of cooking and eating that has been part of community life for a long time. People in Lahore often share food. People eat together in restaurants, on the street, and at home. So, the poem says that food is related to relationships and feeling like you belong.

Food is a sign of who you are in many cultures. It shows where you came from and what you care about. Dharker's poem makes the Lahore karhai a symbol of Pakistani culture. The spices, the way the food is cooked, and the lively setting all make it feel like this isn't just a meal, but a cultural experience. The dish is a perfect example of what Lahore is like: warm, welcoming, and full of life.

The poet's focus on this dish shows how food can be a strong way to show who you are. Eating a traditional dish is a way for someone who has lived in different countries to reconnect with their roots. It is a way to show that you belong to a culture.

### **Taste, Smell and Sound: Food as a Sensory Experience**

One of the most interesting things about Dharker's poem is how rich it is in sensory details. Dharker uses sensory imagery to make the poem vivid and emotionally powerful because food is something we experience through our senses. The reader can almost smell the spices, hear the pan sizzling, and picture how hot the food is when it's served.

Imagery is a common way for writers to talk about food because it makes the reader's mind and memory work. When we read about food, we don't just picture it; we also remember how it tasted and smelt to us. Food is a very useful tool for writing. Dharker uses this tool to make the poem and the reader feel very close to each other.

Cooking in a karhai is an active process. The dish is made by heating it up a lot, adding oil, spices, and stirring. The sizzling sound, the smell coming from the pan, and the sight of steam all make you hungry and excited. These sensory aspects make the food seem real. They also say that food isn't passive; it's an active part of life that is full of energy and movement.

The sensory description also describes Lahore. The dish and the city are both described as lively and full of life. This is how food becomes a symbol of the city's personality. People know Lahore for its busy streets, colourful markets, and lively way of life. The karhai dish is a great example of that.

Dharker doesn't just talk about food; she makes it an experience by using sensory imagery. The poem is so vivid that it feels like you're watching a movie. This immersion in the senses is important because it is through sensory experiences that memory is triggered.

### **Food as a Memory Trigger**

One of the most important themes in *At the Lahore Karhai* is memory. Food can bring back memories in a way that other things can't. This is because taste and smell are closely linked to the brain's emotional and memory centers. Many people suddenly remember things when they smell a dish they know or taste something from their childhood. Dharker's poem gets this psychological truth across.

The poet is not just eating the Lahore karhai right now. It turns into a door to the past. The dish brings back memories of Lahore, of the past, of people and places that are important to the poet's life. Food becomes a memory box, holding all the things that have happened to you over the years.

The poem says that eating is also a way to remember. The poet is not only feeding her body when she eats the dish; she is also feeding her memory. The dish brings back memories of her home country and her cultural roots. It makes her think of her roots and the traditions she carries with her.

This memory is not only individual but also communal. The people of Lahore own the city's food culture, and the karhai dish is a symbol of that culture. It is a custom that has been passed down through the years. So, the poet's memories are connected to the memories of her city and her people.

Food tells stories in a way. The spices and flavours tell stories about Lahore's past, its people, and its culture. In this way, food is like a language that keeps memories alive.

### **Nostalgia: The Emotional Burden of Memory**

The poem has a very nostalgic tone. Nostalgia is a feeling that makes you happy and sad at the same time. It is the desire for something familiar and loved, often something that is lost or far away. This feeling is very strong in Dharker's poem.

For someone who has lived in another country, home is both a memory and a wish. Lahore is more than just a place; it is an emotional landscape. The poet might feel both connected to and separate from it. This distance makes me want to be with you. Food is one of the few things that can help. The poet feels closer to Lahore when she eats Lahore karhai, but the act of eating also reminds her that she is not there for good. So, the food tastes both sweet and sour.

The poem makes you feel nostalgic by using the dish's warmth and the setting's warmth. The poet feels at ease, but that ease is mixed with longing. The poem says that remembering can help and hurt at the same time. It can make you happy, but it can also make you feel sad and lonely.

The Lahore karhai stands for this feeling of longing for the past. It stands for the poet's home country, which he remembers and loves. The spices and flavours have a lot of meaning. They are more than just ingredients; they carry emotion.

### **Food as a way to feel better and heal emotionally**

Comfort is another important emotional part of the poem. Food can help people feel better emotionally. When people are stressed, lonely, or homesick, they eat comfort food. Traditional foods make them think of home and family. This is a universal truth that Dharker's poem shows. The Lahore karhai is a rich and filling dish that stands for warmth and food. It fills you up and makes you feel good at the same time. The poet's experience of eating the dish turns into an emotional one. It's like getting a hug from home. The food makes her feel better and reminds her of her culture.

The warmth of the karhai also makes you think of people. In South Asian culture, giving someone food is a way to show love and welcome. People think that feeding someone is a kind thing to do. This cultural meaning is shown in the poem. The dish stands for love, but not romantic love—love for family and friends.

The poet's feelings about the food show that it helps her heal. Food helps her remember who she is and where she came from. It helps her feel less out of place. So, the poem shows that food is something very emotional that can give people comfort and emotional stability.

### **Food and Community: Being together and making friends**

In many cultures, especially in South Asia, people don't often eat alone. Eating together is a social event. People get together with their families and friends, share food, and talk. Eating becomes a group activity. Dharker's poem talks about this social side of food.

The Lahore karhai is usually served in a way that everyone shares. People sit together and eat from the same plate, which is often bread like naan. Eating together makes people feel close and connected. It makes relationships stronger. The setting of eating at a Lahore karhai place in the poem makes it seem like you belong and have friends.

The poem suggests that food is not just about making people happy, but also about bringing people together. People in Lahore's restaurants are very friendly and talkative. The noise of people talking, laughing, and ordering food makes the experience even more emotional. Food is a part of social life.

This social aspect gives the poem another layer of emotion. The poet might be thinking about how food brings people together. In a world where people might feel alone or cut off from others, food can bring people together.

For the poet, being at the Lahore Karhai isn't just about eating; it's also about being part of a community, even if it's only for a little while. It is about feeling like you belong to the cultural rhythm of Lahore. This experience makes people feel less alone and more connected to their emotions.

### **Food and the Sense of Place: Lahore as an Emotional Place**

The poem is very much about Lahore as a place. Lahore isn't just a place; it's also an emotional presence. The food in the city shows what it is like. The Lahore karhai dish is a symbol of the city's spirit. People know Lahore for its street food. People often say that the city is the heart of Pakistani culture. It has to do with art, music, poetry, and food. By picking Lahore as the setting, Dharker shows how culturally rich the city is.

The poem uses food to show what Lahore is like. The karhai stands for Lahore's warmth, life, and friendliness. The spices and flavours make the city come alive. This means that we don't just see a place; we also taste and smell it.

For the poet, Lahore is a place that brings back memories and feelings. It might stand for childhood, family, or cultural roots. So, the city is now a part of who she is emotionally. Food is how she gets back in touch with the city.

The poem says that you can carry a place with you through memories of food. Even if the poet goes far away, Lahore stays with her through its smells and tastes.

### **Food as a Representation of Migration and Diasporic Experience**

Imtiaz Dharker's life and work frequently embody the experience of migration. Food is a way for people who move or live in diaspora communities to keep their culture alive. In a foreign land, traditional foods help people keep their sense of who they are. Food becomes a part of culture.

The poet's focus on a traditional dish in *At the Lahore Karhai* suggests that food is a part of who she is. The dish is a link to where she came from. It reminds her of what she has inside her, even though they are far apart.

Moving to a new place can cause emotional problems. People who move to a new country may feel torn between two cultures. They might feel like they belong in one place but live in another. This makes you feel like you don't belong. Food is a way to lessen that feeling of being out of place. When immigrants cook or eat food from their home country, they feel more at home.

This poem expresses how people feel when they leave their home country. The poet may not be in Lahore right now, but the dish brings back memories of Lahore for her. It turns into a way to come back. This return may not last long, but it is very emotional.

So, food becomes a sign of the migrant's fight and hope. It shows the need to keep one's cultural identity while living in a new place.

### **Spices as Metaphors: Cultural and Emotional Depth**

The spices in the Lahore karhai are not just for cooking; they also stand for something. Spices stand for depth, richness, and intensity. In the poem, they can be seen as signs of deep feelings and rich culture.

Like spices add flavour to a dish, memories add meaning to our lives. The poet's feelings are complicated, like a mix of spices. There is warmth, longing, comfort, and sadness all at the same time. The poem shows how complicated these feelings are.

Spices are also a sign of cultural identity. People know that South Asian food has a lot of strong spices. These spices set this culture apart from others. So, spices become signs of how different cultures are. They stand for Lahore's history and traditions.

In the poem, spices might also mean passion and energy. Lahore is a lively and energetic city. The spices bring this energy to life. They become symbols of the city's spirit.

So, the poem's "spices of emotion" are both real and figurative. They stand for the poet's strong feelings and rich culture.

### **Food and Family History**

The poem is mostly about eating in public in Lahore, but it also hints at family memory. Family get-togethers, celebrations, and cooking at home are all things that are often associated with traditional foods. People still think of meals they had at home when they eat out.

The poet may think of family members, meals from childhood, and times spent together when they see the Lahore karhai. The poem doesn't always say these memories directly, but it does through the way it makes you feel.

People often remember their loved ones through food. People feel emotionally connected to someone when they eat a dish that their mother or grandmother used to make. The poem shows how food can make us feel. The dish serves as a reminder of connections.

So, food becomes a way to remember family. It links the poet to her past and the people she loves.

### **Food and the Idea of Belonging**

One of the main emotional themes in Dharker's poetry is belonging. Food is a way to show that you belong in At the Lahore Karhai. The poet thinks that eating this dish brings her back to her home country and her cultural roots.

Being a part of something doesn't always mean being there in person. It's also about feeling close to someone. The poem says that food can make this emotional connection. It makes the poet feel at home.

The Lahore karhai is a symbol of belonging because it is something that people know. Being familiar makes you feel at ease. It makes the poet remember who she is and where she came from. This strengthens her sense of self.

The poem might also say that belonging is hard. The poet could be from more than one place. She could have a mixed identity. Food is one of the few things that stays the same in her cultural identity.

So, in the poem, food is a strong sign of belonging.

### **Food and the Concept of Celebration**

People often eat karhai dishes to celebrate. People only cook them for special events and get-togethers. The dish in the poem could stand for happiness and celebration. The poet's experience of eating it becomes a celebration of Lahore and its culture.

The poem says that food makes people happy. Eating a tasty meal is a happy experience in and of itself. But food is also a source of pride for many cultures. The poet might be honouring her roots with the dish.

The lively food culture in Lahore also adds to the festive mood. People in Lahore are known for their love of food and excitement. So, the poem shows how happy the city is.

This part of the poem that talks about celebration makes it feel warm and fuzzy. It implies that food is not merely for survival but also for pleasure and cultural representation.

### **Food as a Way to Talk and Show Yourself**

Food can be thought of as a way to talk. People show who they are, how much they care, and how welcoming they are through food. The Lahore karhai serves as a means of communication in the poem. It shows the culture and spirit of Lahore.

The poet might not need words to feel like they belong in Lahore. The dish itself talks. The spices, the way the food is cooked, and the fact that everyone eats together all have cultural meaning. Food becomes a way to show who you are without saying anything.

This idea is important because Dharker's poetry often looks at language and how people talk to each other. She knows that language can be both a bridge and a barrier because she has lived in different cultures. Food, on the other hand, is a language that everyone understands. People can share food even if they don't speak the same language.

So, the poem says that food is a strong way to connect people across borders.

## Conclusion

Imtiaz Dharker's poem "At the Lahore Karhai" beautifully shows how food, memory, and emotion are all connected. The Lahore karhai dish is more than just a meal; it is a cultural symbol, a memory trigger, and an emotional carrier. Dharker uses sensory imagery to make the reader feel the dish's warmth, richness, and intensity. The spices, smells, and shared space make Lahore and its lively food culture come to life.

The poem shows how food can bring back memories of home, childhood, and feeling like you belong. It shows how the poet misses Lahore and how much she cares about her cultural roots. The Lahore karhai becomes a bridge between past and present, between the poet and her homeland. It stands for comfort, community, celebration, and identity.

The poem's most important point is that food is more than just something we eat. Food is a way to share culture and history. It has the stories of families, cities, and customs inside it. It can heal emotional distance and help people connect with their roots. At the Lahore Karhai, food becomes an emotional experience full of memories, warmth, and a sense of belonging.

So, Dharker's poem is a strong literary look at how food can help us remember things and bring up strong feelings. The Lahore karhai is more than just a dish; it is a "plate of memories" and a "spice of emotion" that shows who the poet is and how she will always be connected to Lahore.

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