

# Can a chutney sting?

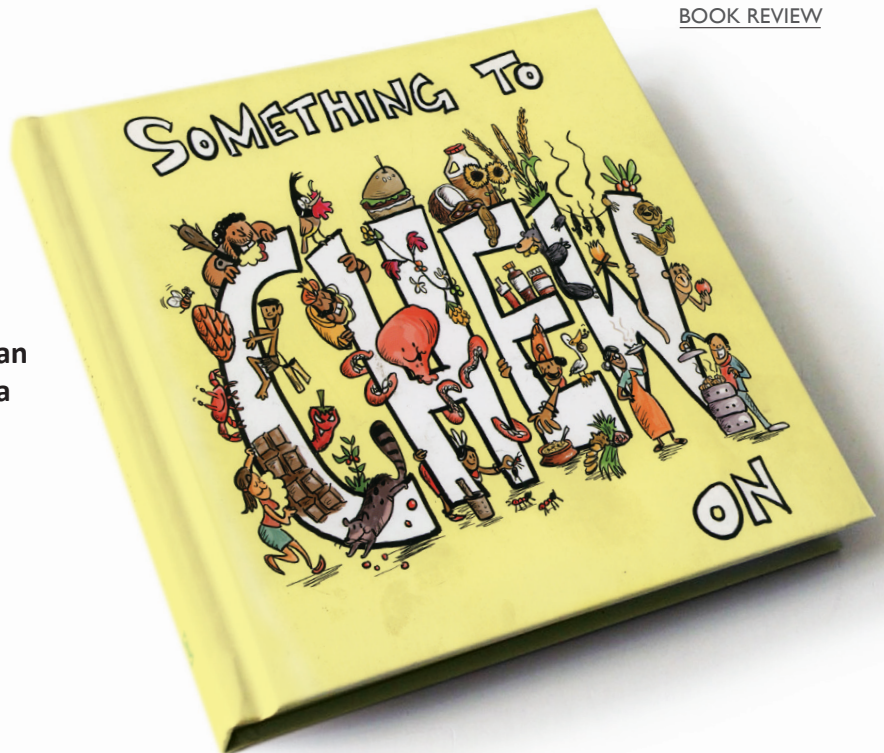
Insightful stories, like that of an ant-based chutney, make for a compelling read

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**Illustrations:** Rohan Chakravarty

**Publisher:** Kalpavriksh  
84 pages, Price: ₹150

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Parents nowadays complain that our children's diet is not balanced enough and that they are fussy about food. The situation turns worse when a child develops a taste for all the wrong kinds of food. Often this can result in an intake of food supplements. Food is one of the most influential aspects of our life. It gives each one of us a different identity. Hence the phrase, we are what we eat.

*Something To Chew On* deals with various aspects of food in an engaging and amusing way while providing an insight into the journey of food. It begins with how hunters became farmers and also explains the global spread of farming.

The chapter 'I swear the chutney doesn't sting' shows our dependency on wildlife for food. Amongst the tribes of Central India, a chutney made of red ants is quite famous, and also has a high nutritional value.

'Tasty titbits,' another chapter delves into the importance of trees, plants, flowers, insects, rodents,

worms and their contribution in experimenting with our food in different parts of India. Food should not always look tasty and mouth-watering but should also have a nutritional value, informs the book. The writers dutifully mention how processed food can be harmful for our body as they contain chemical preservatives. The polished grains, our first choice from supermarkets, are actually "only fair but has nothing lovely about it." They have lost all their nutritional value in the process of being polished, describes the book.

One way to keep a check on our medical bills is to check our food habits. Turmeric powder, ginger, fenugreek seeds, carom, drumstick, stone apple, and honey can help us in keeping away many diseases. The book informs that the seeds and leaves of Stinking Cassia or Chakunda help in treating colic, constipation, skin ailments and ringworms. Jeevak, a scholar of medicine during the time of Buddha had said that every plant has a medicinal value. Such titbits of information have been

shared throughout the book.

Food is not just a source of nutrition but it also represents our culture. The book also narrates stories to show the link between food and culture.

For instance, farming festivals and food are intricately linked. *Pitha*, *Sadya*, *Til gud* are our traditional foods which are slowly losing their lustre.

The most delightful part of this book is the introduction to Genetically Modified crops, the impact of packaging, wastage of food and food security measures such as Mid-day meals, and importantly what each of us can do to save food.

There is abundant information both for mothers and children, to help them approach food from a new perspective. While the language is comprehensible, the cartoons and illustrations are commendable. Instead of compiling everything together, different parts could have justified all the sections by adding more inputs to each. ■

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