Reimagining the Culinary: Representations, Remembrances and Resistances in Select Works of Recipe Fiction

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis titled "**Reimagining the Culinary: Representations, Remembrances and Resistances in Select Works of Recipe Fiction**" is a bonafide record of studies and research carried out by **Ms. Lisa John Mundackal** under my supervision, and submitted to the University of Calicut for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English. To the best of my knowledge, this research work has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, or such similar title, or recognition. The contents of the thesis have undergone plagiarism check using **iThenticate** software at C.H.M.K. Library, University of Calicut, and the similarity index found within the permissible limit. I also declare that the thesis is free from AI generated contents.

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I hereby declare that the thesis entitled "**Reimagining the Culinary: Representations, Remembrances and Resistances in Select Works of Recipe Fiction**" is based on the original work done by me under the guidance of **Dr. Asha Thomas**, and has not been included in any other thesis submitted previously for the award of any degree. The contents of the thesis have undergone plagiarism check using **iThenticate** software at C.H.M.K. Library, University of Calicut, and the similarity index found within the permissible limit. I also declare that the thesis is free from AI generated contents.

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This is to certify that the corrections and suggestions recommended by the adjudicators, in the thesis titled "**Reimagining the Culinary: Representations, Remembrances and Resistances in Select Works of Recipe Fiction**" submitted by Ms. Lisa John Mundackal (U.O.No. 9828/2017/Admn Dated 07.08.2017), Research Scholar, Centre for Research in English, St. Joseph's College (Autonomous), Irinjalakuda, have been duly incorporated. This has been confirmed by the Chairperson of the Open Defence and Viva-Voce. The contents of the hard copy and the soft copy submitted herewith are one and the same.

Dr. Asha Thomas
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10.09.2025

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Lisa John Mundackal

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

Recipe Fiction as a literary genre is shaped by its hybrid format that conjoins elements of a novel and of a cookbook. This thesis examines four novels that adhere to this structural hybridity- *Like Water for Chocolate* by Laura Esquivel, *The Kitchen Daughter: A Novel* by Jael McHenry, *Pomegranate Soup* by Marsha Mehran, and *The Cuttlefish: A Novel* by Maryline Desbiolles. The novels, marked by the presence of food recipes in them, emerge to be multidimensional texts which call for a performative engagement from the reader. The study seeks the possibilities of reading Recipe Fiction as women's life scripts, and reclaiming their muted voices from the kitchen. It proposes to address the research gap that persists in the domain of Food Studies, around domestic kitchen spaces and cooking practices. The study foregrounds the creative, the transformative and the subversive aspects of domestic culinary practices as they interact with the complex dynamics of memory, agency and selfhood. Ingenious representations of the domestic kitchen spaces, formative remembrances of the sensorial, gastronomic encounters, and resistances that impel the cook towards empowerment and actualisation, shape the way the culinary is reimagined. The texts are studied for their capacity to challenge constrictive cultural norms, intimidating personal constraints, and discriminatory historical erasures. Theoretical postulates are borrowed from feminist geography, gustemology, infrapolitics, and power feminism to construct a framework for the textual analyses. The research seeks to reimagine domestic cooking as an empowering act, by evaluating its dynamic, reinventive and transformative prospects.

Keywords: Domestic kitchen, culinary practices, hybrid texts, recipe fiction, self-articulation

പ്രബന്ധസംഗ്രഹം

പാചക കുറിപ്പുകളും കഥകളും കോർത്തിണക്കി രൂപപ്പെടുത്തിയ സങ്കരയിനം നോവലുകൾ ആണ് റെസിപ്പി ഫിക്ഷൻ. പാചകവും സാഹിത്യവും കൂട്ടി മിശ്രിതമാക്കി എഴുതിയിരിക്കുന്ന നാല് നോവലുകളെ അടിസ്ഥാനമാക്കിയാണ് ഈ പഠനം നടത്തിയിരിക്കുന്നത് – ലോറ എസ്ക്വിവേലിന്റെ ലൈക് വാട്ടർ ഫോർ ചോക്ലേറ്റ്, ജായേൽ മക്ഹെൻറിയുടെ ദ് കിച്ചൻ ഡോക്ടർ: എ നോവൽ, മാർഷാ മെഹ്റന്റെ പൊമെഗ്രനറെ സൂപ്പ്, മാറിലീൻ ഡെബിയോളിന്റെ ദ് കട്ടിൽഫിഷ്: എ നോവൽ. പാചകകുറിപ്പുകളുടെ സാന്നിധ്യം ഈ നോവലുകൾക്ക് ഒരു ബഹുമുഖ പ്രവണത പകർന്നുകൊടുക്കുന്നു. വായനാസ്വാധനത്തിന് പുറമെ പരീക്ഷണ സ്വാതന്ത്ര്യം കൂടി വായനക്കാർക്കു നൽകുന്നു എന്ന സവിശേഷത ഇത്തരം നോവലുകൾക്കുണ്ട്. സാധാരണയായി സ്ത്രീസാന്നിധ്യം കൊണ്ട് സ്വാഭാവികമായ ഒരു സ്ത്രയിണത കടന്നുകൂടുന്ന സ്ഥലം എന്ന നിലയിൽ സമൂഹത്താൽ മുദ്രകുത്തപ്പെടുന്ന ഇടങ്ങളാണ് വീട്ടിലെ അടുക്കളകൾ. സ്ത്രീ ജീവിതവുമായി അത്രമേൽ ഇഴുകി ചേർന്ന ഒരു ഇടം എന്ന നിലയിൽ ഓരോ അടുക്കളധ്വനിയും സ്ത്രീയുടെ ജീവിത പ്രതിധ്വനിയായി മാറുന്നു. ഭക്ഷണവും ഭക്ഷണപാരമ്പര്യവും ഭക്ഷണസംസ്കാര പഠനവുമെല്ലാം ഒട്ടനവധി നടന്നിട്ടുണ്ടെകിലും, പാചകത്തെ സംബന്ധിച്ചുള്ള പഠനങ്ങളുടെ അഭാവമാണ് ഈ പ്രബന്ധത്തിന്റെ ഗവേഷണ വിടവ്. ഗാർഹികരംഗം പൊതുവെ പാർശ്വവത്കരിക്കപ്പെടുന്നുണ്ടെങ്കിലും അതിൽതന്നെ തൃണവൽക്കരിക്കപ്പെടുന്ന അടുക്കളകളും, അതിലെ സ്ത്രീജീവിതങ്ങളും, അവരുടെ ജീവിതചര്യയായ പാചകവുമാണ് ഈ പ്രബന്ധം ചർച്ച ചെയ്യുന്നത്. അടുക്കളകളുടെ സ്ഥലസംബന്ധിയായ സ്വഭാവരൂപങ്ങളും, ഇന്ദ്രിയാനുഭവങ്ങളും, ഓർമ്മകളും, ഓർമ്മപ്പെടുത്തലുകളും, പ്രതിരോധങ്ങളുമെല്ലാം ചേർത്ത് വായിക്കുമ്പോൾ പാചകം എന്നത് നിരോധകമായ ഒരു പ്രവർത്തി എന്ന ചിന്ത പുനർവ്യഖ്യാനിക്കപ്പെടുന്നു. പാചകക്കാരിയിലേക്ക് പകർന്നു നല്കപ്പെടുന്ന ഒരു ശക്തി, പാചകകലയിലും അടുക്കളയിലും ഉൾച്ചേർന്നിട്ടുണ്ട് എന്ന നിഗമനം ഉറപ്പിക്കാൻ ശ്രമിക്കുമ്പോൾ അതിലൂടെ സ്ത്രീക്കു കൈവരിക്കാവുന്ന അധികാരവും ആത്മസാക്ഷാത്കാരവും ചർച്ച ചെയ്യപ്പെടുന്നു. സ്ത്രീസ്വത്വം പ്രശോഭിപ്പിക്കുന്ന അടുക്കളയും പാചകവും മുന്നിലേക്ക് വയ്ക്കുന്നത് അവയുടെ സർഗാത്മകതയും, പരിവർത്തനപരവും, വിധ്വാംസകവുമായ ലക്ഷണങ്ങളാണ്. നൈപുണ്യവും, സംവേദകമായ സ്മരണകളും, പ്രതിഷേധവും സംഗമിക്കുന്നതിലൂടെ പാചകം പുനരാവിഷ്കരിക്കപ്പെടുന്നു. സങ്കോചമായ ആദർശങ്ങളും, വ്യക്തിഗതമായ പരിമിതികളും, വിവേചനപരമായ മായിച്ചുകളയലുകളും പൊളിച്ചെഴുതുവാനുള്ള റെസിപ്പി ഫിക്ഷന്റെ കഴിവിനെയാണ് പഠനം പുറത്തുകൊണ്ടുവരുന്നത്. ഫെമിനിസ്റ്റ് ജോഗ്രഫി, ഗസ്റ്റമോളജി, ഇൻഫ്രാപൊളിറ്റിക്സ്, പവർ ഫെമിനിസം എന്നീ സൈദ്ധാന്തിക പ്രമാണങ്ങളുടെ സഹായത്തോടെ നടത്തിയിരിക്കുന്ന ഈ വായന പാചകത്തിലൂടെ സാധ്യമാകുന്ന പരിവർത്തനങ്ങളെയും പരിണാമങ്ങളെയും അഴിച്ചുപണികളെയും മനസ്സിലാക്കാൻ സഹായിക്കുന്നു.

കീ വേർഡുകൾ: വീട്ടടുക്കളകൾ, പാചക വ്യവഹാരങ്ങൾ, സങ്കരപുസ്തകങ്ങൾ, റെസിപ്പി ഫിക്ഷൻ, സ്വയാവിഷ്കാരം

Chapter 1

Introduction

"If there is one sure thing about food, it is that it is never just food. Like the post-structuralist text, food is endlessly interpretable, as gift, threat, poison, recompense, barter, seduction, solidarity, suffocation" (Eagleton 1).

Cultural Studies is an interdisciplinary domain that investigates the process of making culture. It examines the production, circulation, and negotiation of cultural meanings within specific social, political, and historical contexts. Culture, as is often understood, is described in terms of the experiences of the winners and the losers in their consistent struggles to fix meanings in society- a struggle where certain components get more visibility, importance and acceptance than others. Cultural Studies therefore challenges the notion of culture as a fixed or elite domain, and positions itself as a site of contestation where meanings are constantly produced and negotiated through social practices and power relations. It looks at how various artefacts, rituals, texts and practices reflect and reproduce systems of power, and places at its centre, the understanding that culture operates as a mechanism of both domination and resistance, where dominant ideologies are reinforced and yet also open to subversions and rearticulations. Cultural Studies has set a narrative trend which partakes of history, culture and literature.

Food studies which comes under the purview of Cultural Studies as one of its subfields, examines food as a material and symbolic site where social identities, power structures, and historical processes are constituted and contested. It manages to outdo the usual dualisms that pose themselves as divisive menaces which jeopardise most other fields of study. It elevates food beyond its biological and economic

functions and treats it a cultural text through which social hierarchies and collective identities are articulated and reproduced. This field desists from separating the biological from the cultural, the personal from the societal, the local from the global, and instead, foregrounds the struggle with these entanglements. Neither the sociologists nor the anthropologists have abstained from studying food. The former have stirred the food studies pot and the latter have been producing work on topics as varied as hunger and famine in Africa to plenitude, pleasure and the role of cooking in human evolution. Women's Studies and Feminism have also contributed significantly to the growth of Food Studies. They have laboured to legitimise an aspect of human behaviour which is so inextricably associated with women, at all times and across all cultures. Food has also been increasingly politicized, exposing the complex links between production and consumption of it. Food Studies foregrounds how food practices and discourses intersect with systems of power and inequality. Cooking and eating become embodied practices through which individuals and communities navigate and challenge sociopolitical structures, rendering the kitchen as a site of struggle where power, agency, and identity are dynamically negotiated.

Food links the body and the mind; the concrete and the abstract; the self and the other; the personal and the political; the individual and the collective; the tangible and the intangible, and hence has risen to be a legitimate field of study. It serves as a powerful lens through which one can constantly examine the flux in the social fabric. It is one of the most effective media with its lens zoomed in on the social world. As Marcel Mauss has defined it, food is a "total social phenomenon" (3). The familiarity of the subject spurs opinions from all, and raises a gamut of questions ranging from plenitude, pleasure, fitness, and finesse to issues of disease, dearth, hunger, and hatred; from the microcosmic level of individuals and families to the global and

collective level. Food is a subject of serious scientific research and a source of inspiration for art, music and literature, both "high-brow and more popular" (Jackson 4). It is a ubiquitous and all-encompassing subject which pervades our lives, that we confront it on a daily regularity and also experience its philosophical, spiritual and ethical dynamics. Warren Balesco notes, "Food is a strong 'edible dynamic' binding present and past, individual and society, private household and world economy, palate and power" (5). Elspeth Probyn also argues that when it comes to eating food, "we grapple with concerns about the animate and inanimate, authenticity and sincerity, about changing familial patterns, about the local rendered global, about whether sexual and alimentary predilections tell us everything about ourselves, about colonial legacies of the past for those of us who live in stolen lands, about whether we are eating or being eaten" (3).

An academic exploration of the realm of food exposes many culinary antinomies within it, helping us comprehend the layers of complex politics embedded therein- the mutually incompatible notions of novelty and tradition, satiety and starvation, frugality and extravagance, health and indulgence, apprehensions and pleasures, local and global, safety and risk, callousness and caution, and more. These categories often pervade the everyday life practices and patterns of people to such an extent that they influence their banal acts of purchasing, preparing, consuming and even jettisoning of food.

Human history and the story of the race's culture and civilisation is entangled and powered by the story of food. At the base of human existence, food plays a decisive role, designing minds and bodies and engineering change. Every significant arena of our lives- from the quotidian rituals, leisure engagements and aesthetic

indulgences to political phenomena, social interactions and commercial exchanges- lies entwined with the influences of food. Food fuels- literally and metaphorically- economic practices, social movements, trade relations and international policies.

Trapped in the quagmire of political and cultural coatings, food is no longer a naïve material entity but an intricate social phenomenon laden with complex, floppy and fluidic layers of meaning. It is not only what kind of food one eats, but the patterns and ways of eating it, the rationale of eating it, and the people who one eats with, which can speak the story of society, history, culture, climate and other such determinant dynamics that shape our lives, and can facilitate an assessment of individual and collective identities.

Though a very recent entrant to scholastic circles, in the past few decades, food has been studied from multiple vantage points, based on varied epistemologies and under evolving zeitgeists. Though its ubiquity often reduces it to its most essential nutritive properties that sustain life, it has begun to manifest the possibilities of wider and richer readings beyond its implicit and definitive material properties. When read beyond the immediate lines of chemistry and biology, food becomes a significant social signifier, forging and fostering relationships; making and breaking bonds. It is a highly symbolic presence in religious and magical rites, a strong element in developing and maintaining cultural distinctions, and shaping individual identities.

Most sacred texts- both of the East and of the West- are rich with references and interpretations of food and its transformational properties. A good part of these religious texts discuss the politics of purity and uphold the notion of taboos associated with it. Food scholar Carole M Counihan notes in her book *The Anthropology of Food and Body: Gender, Meaning and Power,* that “food is a product and mirror of the

organisation of society on both the broadest and the most intimate levels" (6). The variety and range of foods which are tried or tabooed, the deftness and skill of the hands which prepare and serve them, and the techniques and patterns of its preparation and sharing- all speak of the subtle forces that are operational in structuring a society. When the French food critic Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin scripted his aphoristic statement "Tell me what you eat and I will tell you what you are" (15) in his popular work *The Physiology of Taste,* he was thinking beyond the obvious fact of physiology and materiality, of the embedded and subtle social and cultural facts of ingestion. Food ways of a society in other words reflect the politics and culture of that society.

Food, undoubtedly presents itself as a key to comprehend any culture, be it of the Orient or the Occident. In the Indian context particularly, with its multifarious beliefs, customs, and practices, cuisines are relatively heterogeneous and pluralistic. The Indian gastronomic landscape has been a mosaic of several influences and exchanges. The land has bartered and borrowed, not just ingredients and nomenclatures, but culinary utensils and techniques, so much so as to effect an amalgamation of cuisines which have been shaped and reshaped over the years to suit the Indian palates. There has been a plethora of food writings that have spiced up the Indian literary terrain. *Fasting Feasting* by Anita Desai, *The Mistress of Spices* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, *The Inheritance of Loss* by Kiran Desai are some of the early writings that have enriched the field. It has been further peppered by more recent writings like *Alphabet Soup for Lovers* by Anita Nair, *The Anger of the Aubergines: Stories of Women and Food* by Bulbul Sharma, and more, where food becomes passion and power. A large host of Indian food fiction writers dwell on the longings and conflicts experienced by their diasporic characters. There have also been hybrid

texts in the field, mostly memoirs, which are largely structured by food memories, and interspersed with recipes. *A Taste of My Life* by Chitrita Banerji, *Climbing the Mango Trees* by Madhur Jaffrey are texts which fall in this category. Indian fiction that is built around the cultural trope of food, often unleashes a profound and complex set of rigmaroles that activate Indian culinary discourses and deliberations.

Critical inquiries into and perspectives on food have been shaped and structured over the past few decades by several seminal writers like K.T. Achaya, whose works like *Indian Food: A Historical Companion*, *A Historical Dictionary of Indian Food, The Story of Food,* and others, continue to remain one of the most comprehensive approaches to Indian culinary history. Achaya's works remain the foundational texts that help trace the evolution of culinary practices, their mythical and legendary lineages, colonial interfaces, regional variations, trade connections, migrations and such of their profound aspects. Arjun Appadurai stands as another influential figure in the domain, with his highly insightful readings in "How to Make a National Cuisine" where he examines the role played by cookbooks in shaping the nation's identity, reflecting both regional diversities and cultural cohesion.

Anthropologist Krishnendu Ray's *Migrant Table* is noted for its interesting explorations of the food practices of immigrant Indians in the United States, reflecting on the connections between food, memory, and identity. Uma Narayan's *Dislocating Cultures* is yet another influential work that interrogates the essentialisation of Indian food in the discursive spaces, and locates culinary practices as sites of resistance and negotiation. Indian food writing, both critical and fictional, extends beyond domestic spaces to engage with broader questions of memory, migration, and identity, positioning food as a powerful medium for cultural expression and historical

reckoning. Being consumed on a daily basis in most cases, food is perceived as a presumed presence in the cultural lives of humanity, and ingestion often becomes simultaneously, an individual as well as a collective enterprise. Beyond being a mere tool for sustenance and a means for survival, it is a key component in shaping one's views about oneself and others. As stated by Roland Barthes, food is "a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations and behaviour" (24). In their seminal work *Food and Culture: A Reader,* Counihan and Esterick state that "information about food must be gathered wherever it can be found: by direct observation in the economy, in techniques, usages and advertising, and by indirect observation in the mental lives of a given society" (29). The eventual culinary journal that gets scripted often has variegated hues and flavours that encapsulate the true essence of life itself.

Though food studies is a relatively young domain in academia, this burgeoning field has already been enriched with several seminal works which have approached the discipline from multivalent perspectives. *Food and Culture: A Reader* edited by Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik is a comprehensive anthology of theoretical and conceptual essays which study the intersections between food, cultures and communities. It is a delectable compilation of flavourful essays from anthropological, sociological, historical, and philosophical standpoints. The diversity of perspectives offered on food, makes this text an anytime reference source that guides us further into the intricacies of this interdisciplinary field. From foundational to very contemporary observations on the trends in the area, this anthology offers a rich platter that has incorporated tastes from across a broad cartography and cultural canvas. As the editors themselves describe it, the book offers a "taste of the diverse array of scrumptious intellectual dishes that await further pursuit" (3) and is a

reaffirmation that “food touches everything and is the foundation of every economy, marking social differences, boundaries, bonds, and contradictions- an endlessly evolving enactment of gender, family and community relationships” (3). Divided into five sections, the book provides the gamut of available theoretical insights on food ranging from semiotics through structuralism, cultural materialism, symbolism and feminism, and sampling possible methodological vistas for further research in food.

Conversations in Food Studies, edited by Colin R. Anderson, Jennifer Brady and Charles Z. Levkoe is yet another path-breaking work that integrates methodological and epistemological perspectives of the discipline to lay a table rich with themes ranging from food movements to representations, governance and more. The text registers its novelty through its attempt to redraw the traditional boundaries of academia, and by being a propeller towards newer aspects and dimensions of food. Amy L. Tigner and Allison Carruth’s *Literature and Food Studies* is yet another noteworthy intervention into the cross-disciplinary areas of the domain where literary studies and food studies meet. It illumines the readers on the burgeoning interdisciplinariness that entails a confluence of literary genres and cultural movements as they engage and interact with the edible world. Owing to the inherent genomic structure of literature that interacts with the private and the public; the intimate and the distant; the microcosmic and the macrocosmic, traversing vertically and laterally, it becomes a crucial and potential area of inquiry for food studies. Amy and Allison establish through their work, their view that the relationship between literary practices and food practices is recursive- one that structures the other, rather than merely mirroring it. The work brings to its readers the core concepts in Food Studies which have emerged and evolved since its inception decades ago, how literary texts resonate with these core ideas in Food Studies and how they also progress on

parallel planes, oftentimes overlapping. The work examines how literature represents food and how these representations can reveal the broader cultural, social and political concerns. The authors advocate for an intersectional analysis blending literary investigation and insights from Food Studies, with the agenda of facilitating a deeper comprehension of both fields. The writers not only discuss imaginative, mainstream literary texts but also consider an analysis of "vernacular literary practices- practices that take written form as horticultural manuals, recipes, cookbooks, restaurant reviews, agricultural manifestos, dietary treatises, culinary guides, and more" (Amy and Allison 1). As the authors themselves claim, they "model an approach to literature and food that integrates the methods of cultural history, close reading, and archival research with concepts drawn from both literary studies—such as narrative, rhetoric, form, audience, authorship, and taste—and food studies—such as foodways, food justice, gastronomy, and agrarianism" (4).

In its traversal over the past few decades, Food Studies has expanded and has relationally transformed itself along several theoretical scaffolds. In its inception phase, what ruled the discipline was primarily a functionalist approach that foregrounded the nutritive and material dimensions of food. Anthropologists like Audrey Isabel Richards and Margaret Mead were lead voices in this phase. Audrey's work *Hunger and Work in a Savage Tribe* was the foundational text on the sociology of food. It laid the ground for later research which legitimized the study of women's lives in the social sphere. Mead too focused largely on the dietary patterns and the demographic variations of it, cultural attitudes to food and the resultant changes inflicted on food habits. Her writings articulated "the centrality of foodways to human culture and thus to social science" (Counihan and Esterik 4). With works like

"Changing Significance of Food", Mead was a big influence on nutrition educators of the day, as the times were the critical years of World War II and rationing.

The Structuralists who came after the Functionalists, chose to take a deeper and broader approach to food, seeking means to decode the cultural and social imbrications of it. When the utilitarian aspects of food were underscored by the Functionalists, giving primacy to the physicality of it, the same were underplayed by the Structuralists who prioritised the social and cultural contexts encircling food, and the semantic significance of it. The nutritive and the biological were pushed to the second row, only to be superseded by the social and the cultural. The Structuralists primarily adopted the Saussurean linguistic analysis towards food. Among the Structuralists, Claude Levi-Strauss pioneered, with his landmark text *The Raw and the Cooked.* Strauss posited a structural analysis of food through the study of certain myths from indigenous cultures of the world. His analysis was structurally shaped on a binary and oppositional distinction of food into raw and cooked; nature and culture. He ascribed universality to this underlying structure and established it as a formula to link the diverse cultural settings. His conceptual framework is vividly illustrated in his "Culinary Triangle" which located three prime points- the raw, the cooked and the rotted- within this "triangular semantic field" (Strauss 41). It also elaborates on the cultural interpretations of food, and the culinary codes and practices embedded in cultures, which preserve their respective norms, traditions and formats.

Another influential Structuralist who has contributed to the field of Food Studies is the French semiotician Roland Barthes. In his essay "Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption" Barthes explicates how food is beyond a mere collection of products that facilitate nutritional and statistical

purposes. He describes food as a “real sign, perhaps the functional unit of a system of communication” (24) and that “all food serve as a sign among the members of a given society” (24). He equates food to a system of communication which operates like a language, and further elaborates on how the choice of it, its preparation, and its consumption engender significations which convey cultural meanings and values. He also elucidates how foods forge national and social identities, not leaving out the entangling elements of class and race which further complicate food systems. His analysis of some of the everyday foods of the West, particularly French foods like steak and chips, wine and milk, with their associated cultural myths, become deconstructive as they expose the ideologies embedded within them. His works are elemental in understanding the patterns in which food constructs and reflects social realities. He harps on the idea of “polysemia of food” (28) when he writes, “food serves as a sign not only for themes, but also for situations, and this, all told, means for a way of life that is emphasized, much more than expressed, by it. To eat is a behavior that develops beyond its own ends, replacing, summing up, and signalizing other behaviours, and it is precisely for these reasons that it is a sign” (28). Food, as he states, “has a constant tendency to transform itself into situation” (29).

Mary Douglas further expounds the cultural connection of food by laying down the notions and principles of purity and impurity; of taboos and dietary rules governing each culture. She observes how a society is driven to order through its codes of distinctions that separate the edible and the inedible. Through her argument regarding how societies are shaped and structured by the ideas of purity and pollution, Douglas lays down the roles of culturally constituted food taboos as crucial to the creations of social boundaries and identities. These boundaries reflect the respective cultural cosmologies and sustain the hierarchies and cohesion within. In her

groundbreaking essay “Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo” she constructs the foundational framework of her Grid/Group theory which classifies societies based on the levels of social regulation and group integration. Her work *Implicit Meanings: Essays in Anthropology* develops her theories further and shares her insights on the everyday food practices, rich with symbolic meanings. For Douglas, food is a code that is embedded with a social component. She writes in her seminal essay “Deciphering a Meal”, “If food is treated as a code, the messages it encodes will be found in the pattern of social relations being expressed. The message is about different degrees of hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and transactions across the boundaries…Food categories therefore encode social events” (Douglas 231). She discusses the implanted boundaries between a meal and a drink; between intimacy and distance; between edible and inedible; between pure and impure; approved and disapproved, in her essay. By discussing the structure of a meal, and the rules of the menu, Mary Douglas removes the lightness and frivolity that is usually associated with food and meals. She establishes that every meal is a structured apparatus which “represents all the ordered systems associated with it” (250).

The rigidity and anti-humanist stance of Structuralism which built itself on the idea that structures exist prior to the human subjects, shaping their perceptions and controlling their actions, soon gave way to a ‘Culturalist’ wave that swept away the notions that meanings are always the result of structures of significations which are rarely private and personal, and mostly collective and shared. Structuralism which posited and allowed the dominant ideology to flourish, eschewed alternatives and sidelined the ordinary and the commonplace. As Bob Ashley *et al* write in their book *Food and Cultural Studies,* in Structuralism, “Mental and social structures exist prior

to their human subjects, organising people's thoughts and ways of living in ways suitable for the maintenance of an unequal society. Culturalism, on the other hand, recovers men and women making their own histories" (10).

Subjective and individual experiences slowly started garnering greater attention and significance. Though there are overt differences in the outlook of Structuralism and Culturalism, between them there is a consensus on the acknowledgement of "a dominant ideology which is imposed from above and resisted from below" (Ashley et al 16-17). Michel de Certeau's work *Practice of Everyday Life: Living and Cooking* interprets food as a resistant strategy in the hands of subordinate collectives. For de Certeau, culinary skill speaks of pleasure as well as protest. Luce Giard, de Certeau's co-author, takes this thought further on her way by projecting everyday life and domain as offering a recluse from dominant cultural forms and productions, and implying the potency for "microresistances" (Ashley et al 13) concealed inside ordinary people, and capable of causing disruptions in the political and social alignments and structures. Culturalism invests itself more in "bounded spaces" (13) which resonate with "microdomination and microresistance" (13), emerging as "a food-cultural method which has paid particular attention to the meaningful mundanity of bounded populations" (16). Giard further expands on her argument that through their gestures and their embodied acts in the kitchen, women have saved themselves from the power traps of the patriarchal culture and structure:

> Women bereft of writing who came before me . . . I would like the poetry of words to translate that of gestures . . . As long as one of us preserves your nourishing knowledge, as long as the recipes of your tender patience are transmitted from hand to hand and from generation to generation, a

> fragmentary yet tenacious memory of your life itself will live on. The sophisticated ritualization of basic gestures has become more dear to me than the persistence of words and texts, because body techniques seem better protected from the superficiality of fashion. (de Certeau and Giard 154)

The story of food is as old as the story of life upon the planet. However, the story of cooked food is only as old as humanity, or better still, as often said, as young as the discovery of fire. However, Armesto and a host of other anthropologists, contest this by establishing and enlisting other ways to make raw food edible, sans the medium of fire. He writes:

> Hanging meat to make it gamey, or just leaving it around to rot a little, is a way of processing for texture and digestibility: it is obviously an older technique than cooking by means of fire. Wind drying, which is a specialized form of hanging, works a profound biochemical change on some foods…. Churning milk is a process of almost alchemical magic: a liquid becomes a solid, white becomes gold. Fermentation is even more magical, because it can turn a boring, staple grain into a potion that can change behavior, suppress inhibitions, conjure visions and unlock imaginary realms. Why should cooking with kindled flame be privileged among all these startling ways of transforming food?
>
> The answer, if there is one, lies in the social effects of fire-cooked food. Cooking deserves its place as one of the great revolutionary innovations of history, not because of the way it transforms food- there are plenty of other ways of doing that-but because of the way it transformed society. Culture begins when the raw gets cooked. The campfire becomes a place of

> communion when people eat around it. Cooking is not just a way of preparing food but of organizing society around communal meals and predictable mealtimes. It introduces new specialized functions and shared pleasures and responsibilities. It is more creative, more constructive of social ties than mere eating together…. The climax of what most cultures think of as a feast-the actual eating-is never reached communally…. But the festive element lies in the preparations. (4-5)

As food historians argue, our first ancestors ate food raw and uncooked, as found on nature's platter. Anthropologists describe cooking as the most "defining human activity" (Pollan 5). In his seminal work *Cooked,* Michael Pollan, the food historian, quotes James Boswell, the Scottish writer who defined Homo sapiens as "the cooking animal" (5) as early as in 1773. Cooking is one of those most deciding and distinguishing markers of humanity, that Boswell writes, "no beast is a cook" (5). In no deviance to this Claude Levi-Strauss also replicates a similar observation that cooking is that symbolic activity which "establishes the difference between animals and people" (6). As Armesto writes,

> Cooking is one of relatively few odd practices which are peculiarly human-odd, that is, in the scales of nature, judged by the standards of common approaches to nourishment. One of history's longest and most luckless quests has been the search for the essence of humanity, the defining characteristic which makes human beings human and distinguishes them collectively from other animals. The effort has led nowhere…. Some are plausible but partial. We arrogate "consciousness" to ourselves without knowing quite what it is or whether other creatures have it. We claim unique powers of language- but

> other animals, were we able to communicate with them, might dispute this. We are relatively inventive in problem solving, relatively adaptable in our ability to inhabit varied environments, relatively dexterous in our use of tools- especially of missiles. We are relatively ambitious in our works of art and in making embodiments of our imaginations. In some respects, in these connections, the gaps between human behaviour and that of other species are so enormous as to qualify, perhaps, as differences of quality. We are genuinely unique in exploiting fire…and only people have ever taken the initiative in harnessing flame. (3)

In his popular work *Catching Fire: How Cooking Made Us Human,* Richard Wrangham, the Harvard anthropologist and primatologist posits the theory that cooking has played a fundamental and crucial role in the evolution of human species. He establishes how cooking of food initiated a host of physiological, anatomical and behavioural changes in human beings by facilitating a better intake of nutrients and calories from the cooked food. This in its turn helped them achieve lot more of productive time which could be invested in newer and more creative outputs, as lesser time was required to chew and digest the cooked food in comparison to the raw and crude food that they had patterned themselves for. By moulding a species with bigger brains and smaller guts, cooking augmented not just the intellectual and physical productivity of human race, but also their social and communal kinship. Cooking fostered social interactions and ties, improving the structures of human society. This could be viewed and documented as the probable inception of the entire gamut of discourse on the interstitial domain of food and culture. As Pollan says, “Freed from the necessity of spending our days gathering large quantities of raw food and then chewing it, humans could now devote their time, and their metabolic resources, to

other purposes, like creating a culture" (6). Wrangham puts forth the "cooking hypothesis" (181) which ascribes the human evolutionary leaps and progressions to the pivotal culinary act of cooking. As he writes, and as Pollan quotes him, "Around that fire, we became tamer" (7).

In his work *A History of Cooks and Cooking,* Michael Symons attempts to postulate his theory of the world according to cooks. He seeks an upliftment and upgradation of cooks and cooking, from their insignificance to worthy evaluation. Bringing a diachronic and transcultural compendium of thoughts and emotions on food and cooking, the magnitude of Symons' work is overwhelming. Moving around his premise that in any culture the cook is a multiplayer who needs to be "put in charge of nothing less than our very lives" (Symons 114) and who help us "connect with the rest of the natural world, while setting us off as social and cultural creatures" (114), the work attempts, latitudinally and longitudinally, to gather data and accounts to hail the cook.

Cooking has become so central a signpost in the inroads to identity, culture, anthropology and more. What is thought to be transformative with regard to human sociability and civility has now evolved into an inevitable component of our physical existence. The storied platters of food are narratives of the transformation of the cook and the cooked. Just as much as food becomes nourishing to the ingester, who partakes of a meal, the act of cooking itself becomes nourishing to the cook. This culinary empowerment of the cook, accomplished through the act of cooking is the main focus of this research. When the gastronomical domain is considered for contemplation and study, it often gets limited to and centred on the act of consumption, thereby relegating the culinary act of preparing and serving food.

Cooking becomes the marginalised phase in the alimentary act. Kitchen remains beyond the ken, and hence blurred and invisible. Particularly in the twenty-first century, when humanity has largely shifted to unscripted meals, fast and hasty, where fears of a culinary apocalypse which is dreaded to reduce cooking to a mere assemblage of ingredients, modelled on a factory-line production, and deskill cooks in general, looms large in the air, it is quite necessary to foreground and place cooking under a magnifying lens and study it for its own sake and for its transformative effects. Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson quotes from the foreword to the work *Mastering the Art of French Cooking,* "The most important ingredient you can bring to [cooking] is love of cooking for its own sake" (81). The passionate indulgence of the women protagonists in the act of cooking, seeking comfort, solace and pleasure out of it, is scrutinised to understand the metamorphoses that entail.

The culinary act of cooking enfolds power within itself, and induces power into the hands that perform the act. In *Word of Mouth,* Ferguson quotes Fannie Farmer who has said, ""Cookery means the knowledge of Medea and of Circe and of Helen of the Queen of Sheeba"" (89). Though they are all "perverse models" (89) lacking in a clean moral stature, they sure are cited by Farmer for their ability to "cast spells and dispense charms (Circe) and make use of opiates (Helen) and poison (Medea)…all about display and seduction" (89). Cooking, as often said, is about the magical and the transformative; it is about enchantment and a mysterious power. In one of his plays *The Deipnosophists*, Athanaeus establishes how cooking is an act of restoration and resurrection when he writes, "I have found the elixir of life: men already dead, once they but catch a whiff from the dish, I cause to live again" (3:290). He writes on to explain how cookery accomplished the beginnings of civilisation. "From a bestial and lawless life that art has freed us; from disgusting cannibalism she

has led us to discipline…a populace came together, cities became civilised, all through this art, I repeat, of cookery" (7:41-43). Akin to Plato's utopian Republic, Fourier envisages Harmony, an ideal, principled and logically structured society. However, unlike the former, Fourier ascribes a star status to cooks in his Harmony. He considers a cook as "a savant of the first order" (Ferguson 59) and cooking, "of all the arts as the most revered in Harmony, the linchpin for all agricultural work and the principal space for education" (60). His gastrosophy elevated cooking to a transcendental status and sensed boundless possibilities in its ordinariness.

Gastronomic discourses play their pivotal part in setting and sustaining a culinary consciousness in their partakers. As the Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu points out, these discourses, with an accompanying set of culinary practices, have established it as an autonomous "cultural field" (162). The diverse culinary landscapes ranging from domestic dining to restaurant spaces, fine dining and haute cuisine to street food shacks and fast food joints, home kitchens to outdoor barbeque spaces, drive-in dining to community dining, have surged to attention, and food bloggers, critics, chefs, gourmets and gastronomes have managed to share the stage in the twenty-first century cultural arena. However, one category that gets relegated and silenced are the home cooks. Domestic cooks are a neglected sect owing to the ordinariness and banality of the cooking that they do within home kitchens. This banality accounts for it to be gendered as feminine labour lacking in the lustre and glamour enjoyed by male chefs and professional cooks in the public domain where it becomes a vocation and is paid and recognised. Though most of the home front cooking was done by women, ironically the world of gastronomic discourses and culinary discussions were for long, largely ruled by men. This incongruity was further aggrandised by the absence of any antecedent women figures in this domain, till about

the middle of the twentieth century. Though to break the rigid colonnades of the canon was tough and arduous, writers like Irma Rombauer, M.F.K. Fisher, Julia Child and others set the ground for women's food talk, which soon evolved itself into a separate genre of women's writing. These writers flittered around the notion that the real transformation and empowerment of a cook ought to legitimately ensue from the woman's world and experience in the domestic realms, and not from the male bastion of professional gastronomy. They took their readers away from the visuals typecasting cooking as drudgery, and helped them reimagine cooking as a sensual and pleasurable act involving the mind and the body. For Irma, cooking was joy, as evidenced by the title of her work *Joy of Cooking* in which she interspersed her recipes with stories and anecdotes, and established a rapport with her readers. The culinary chat that she engaged in, articulated the pleasures associated with the preparation and handling of food. Fisher's works were often a blend of memoirs, travelogues and recipes. Her works, particularly *The Art of Eating,* a collection of five separate books- *Serve it Forth, Consider the Oyster, How to Cook a Wolf, The Gastronomical Me* and *An Alphabet for Gourmets*- contained insightful reflections on food, life and culture. The art of cooking and serving food, the social dynamics of food, histories and cultural significance of foods, food and rations in times of war, personal reflections, childhood memories associated with food, etiquettes and other aspects of dining, the philosophy of food and other interstitial terrains shared by food, and several more aspects of life and culture, accommodated themselves in Fisher's writings. Probably the most seminal of these, *The Gastronomical Me* was particularly popular owing to the autobiographical elements which can be traced in it, where Fisher shares how food shaped her- her identity, relationships and perspectives. With works like *Mastering the Art of French Cooking, Julia's Kitchen Wisdom, The Way to Cook* and several

more, Julia Child was yet another pioneer woman writer in the field of gastronomy, who soon emerged to be one of the common household names in cooking. More than mere cookbooks, her works, particularly *The Way to Cook,* are sources that guide the readers in the fundamentals of cooking. They are motivational guides that persuade anyone to experiment and hone their cooking skills. Her works were precious additions to the culinary repertoire of many home cooks in the West. Most of these writers and their works helped perceive cooking as an elemental and pleasure-giving activity that helped one to surge in spirit and style.

Food has offered and continues to offer women a means for self-expression. Culinary writing, in all its manifestations, is a valid literary territory for expounding and deciphering women's lives. Several women- both in times past and present- have been denied access to established and authorised avenues for self-expression, such as painting, writing, sculpting and other 'noble' art forms. For some of these women, these denials failed to deter them from creative expressions. Their ingenuity advised them to explore other means to reveal their creative element inside. Cooking was one such. Rather than an act that confined them to the kitchen, cooking was for them, a way to gain personal power, both inside and outside their homes. For them, food and cooking have offered an agency and influence. Scholars like Tracie Marie Kelly, Bennay Blend and Patricia M Gantt argue how foods give women a source of power. They examine how preparing a traditional foodstuff offers women a form of self-expression and a way to gain influence and recognition both in the domestic realm and the larger community outside the home. Blend, for instance, has talked about the role of tortilla and tamale-making in the lives of Hispanic women. She explores the important traditional place of these foods in the Hispanic household, and suggests that Chicana feminist authors have challenged traditional notions of domesticity by

showing how women can use tortilla and tamale-making to question the dominant culture and its values. Mary Anne Schofield in her work *Cooking by the Book: Food in Literature and Culture* quotes Clifton Fadiman who has borrowed M.F.K. Fisher's words to say that books about food belong "to the literature of power, those that, linking brain to stomach, etherealize the euphoria of feeding with the finer essence of reflection" (2).

Women and their lives have for long been placed essentially in the peripheral realms of history, and have remained invisible for eons. The late twentieth century however, has witnessed an introspection of the position and role of women. This in itself has initiated a bold leap into giving them a long overdue place in the documented narratives of the world. It has invited a profound and valiant transformation in world historiography since the late 1960s. Literature today includes writings by women and other historically marginalized groups. Their writings are often representations of their experience and their culture- their everyday life- the organisation of production, the structure of the family, the structure of the institution which expresses or governs social relationships, the characteristic forms through which members of society communicate, and more. A lot of this was brought to fruition by the creation of Women's Studies and Gender Studies programmes across the globe. A vast corpus of studies, dealing with multitudes of subjects and approaches studying women and their lives, have been published ever since, ranging from marriage, motherhood and family stories from women's private spheres, to their comparatively rarer appearances and roles in the public sphere. Studies exploring the relationship between women and food, is one of the newest additions to this broad field of research. Some of the most interesting and exciting studies in the field have looked at the role of women in the kitchen, the bonds built between female cooks, the

nexus between the food industry and dietary trends, ‘kitchenscapes’, the role of cookbooks as discursive women’s texts.

Scholarship on women, for long chose to often magnify the rare public entries of women, and the impressions left by them as public functionaries in political spheres. This was a conscious “downplaying of their kitchen duties, which seemed to symbolize women’s subordination and oppression by their patriarchy” (Haber 4). Recent times have however seen more inclusive efforts to renovate history to include the domestic side of the story too, and historians are beginning to turn their gaze towards a new formula that connects home kitchens and the larger community. Food in general has gained more of acceptance in the discursive spaces and seems to have recently acquired the veneer of ‘serious’ academic scrutiny. Apprehensions however, still invade writers’ minds when they decide to write food. They still feel bound, to a large extend, to justify their choice of topic, and their intention to make women’s private lives more visible. Janet Theophano, for instance examines cookbooks throughout American history, and states the purpose of her book, entitled *Eat My Words: Reading Women’s Lives Through the Cookbooks They Wrote* as “twofold: first to make some of those materials known to both scholars and general readers; and second, to open a window into the lives of women of distinct classes, cultures and historical periods who would otherwise be unknown to us” (2). Many writers still feel that their chosen topic of women and food needs to be recognized as a valid field of research. Analysing how women have been represented and defined, exposes a dialectic- the discourses on women, have for long been projecting the oppressive notion of home and kitchen as the place that women are dutifully bound to, and ought to be committed to, but more recently, the discourses and narratives by women, have

also expressed how they have appropriated and redefined their roles as kitchen-keepers, and have uplifted and empowered themselves while being there.

Folklorist Janet Theophano calls attention to the fact that cookbooks are a possibly rich source on women's lives and can be categorized under life writing, when she writes, "Cookbooks are celebrations of identity. Connections to people, places and the past are embedded in the recipes women kept….Often cookbooks have served as a place for readers to remember a way of life no longer in existence or to enter a nostalgic re-creation of a past culture that persists mostly in memory" (8). Maya Angelou, the renowned writer, has remarked that cooking is a natural extension to her autobiography. As Susan Leonardi explains, "like a narrative, a recipe is reproducible, and further, its hearers-readers-receivers are encouraged to produce it and, in reproducing it, to revise it and make it their own…. Unlike the repetition of a narrative, however, a recipe's reproducibility can have a literal result, the dish itself" (344). The etymology of recipe in the word receipt, points out, that such written records also become a witness to something received and passed down through generations. When Maya Angelou in her *Hallelujah! The Welcome Table* considers the role of the culinary in her past, she articulates the potential of the serial processes of gathering, processing, cooking, and eating in a community, that draw her toward the culinary memoir as a natural mode of self-expression.

Cookbooks serve as critical texts offering commentaries- sometimes subtle, sometimes pronounced- on social affairs, political standpoints and cultural affiliations. They tend to take on different formats and styles, and may be read neither as simple instructional texts that guide one's cooking of a specific recipe, nor enlightens one on the sources and history of a specific cuisine. They act as literary

texts as well. Sometimes they are even perceived as novels such that “without ever preparing a dish, reading with one’s imagination is a satisfying act” (Theophano 272). They provide inroads to the analysis of women- of a community/communities.

Cookbooks are a celebration of food, culture, and community, and they demonstrate women’s capacities to appropriate their kitchens and to deconstruct/ reconstruct some of the definitions of womanhood and domesticity imposed on them. As Sherry Inness writes, “Cookbooks were more than a place to record recipes; they were also sites to discuss political issues and included lessons for social change” (7). They may appear to be trivial sources, but they are unique for their potential to add significantly to historical discourse and analysis.

Food is an elemental constituent of culture. As culinary historian Massimo Montanari asserts, “Food is culture when it is produced…when it is prepared…when it is eaten” (x). Cookbook is a medium that influences how food is produced, prepared and eaten, and therefore, studying its text is a way to study culture, and ultimately, a quest for meaning. In their study of the discourse of Japanese American cookbooks, Kelsi and Keri write, “Recipes, with their cooking instructions and surrounding narrative- title, headnotes, serving specifics, images and more, relay personal anecdotes, professional training and food-related experiences that draw the reader into the text and appeal to authenticity, making the text more than a typical manual” (2).

The narrative found in a recipe provides explanations of food-related practices of the cookbook author’s native culture. As a result, recipes function as a “system of communication” (Barthes 24), or a set of patterns that articulate social relationships. In turn, “social relationships form culture which can be understood as the manifestation of the values and beliefs of a community that are constantly negotiated

and renegotiated through shared practices" (Kelsi and Keri 1). Cookbooks become "a way to relate to others from different perspectives, languages and communication patterns" (3). It is probably one of the most transparent genres in literature. As M.F.K. Fisher, the American food writer says, "a recipe is supposed to be a formula, a means prescribed for producing a desired result…there can be no frills about it, no ambiguities…and above all no 'little secrets"' (20).

Editors Janet Floyd and Laurel Forster, in their book *The Recipe Reader: Narratives, Contexts, Traditions* have brought together a collection of essays that capture the essence of recipes by examining these ubiquitous texts from diverse epistemic perspectives. The book elucidates to its readers how food is fulfilling, beyond its alimentary aspects. Over and above the clichéd perspectives on recipes/cookbooks as mere enlistments of ingredients and preparation procedures, the editors examine how these become archives and artefacts that articulate memories, cultures, histories, and knowledge systems, playing crucial roles in the formulations of family dynamics, legacies, gender equations, social transitions, and transformations. They have tried to study how the transmission of these texts effect for women, a channel to reach beyond the constrictions of their homes. Segmented into three major parts, the book proves to be of great cultural significance in particularly foregrounding the discursive and academic alacrity towards accommodating women's histories contained in recipes and cookbooks. Spread across the three sections, "Traditions", "Individual Interventions" and "Contemporary Contexts" is a tasteful platter of explorations done on a long array of aspects associated with recipes, ranging from efforts to elevate them from domestic insignificance to gastronomic significance, the diasporic flavours of migrant communities, the erotic angles of eating as showcased in television cookery shows,

women's interventions- though not direct- through recipes, into the World War I and their crucial role as "culinary soldiers" (91), the narratives of health, discipline and productivity actualised through recipes, the cultural essences captured in oral culinary traditions like in African communities, and more.

In her book *Recipes for Reading: Community Cookbooks, Stories, Histories,* editor Ann L Bower discusses the textuality and readability of recipes, which are, as Carolyn Heilburn says, used to "write a woman's life" (Bower 11), and are the valuable and meaningful articulations of selves and their world. Though, like women-made quilts which were once considered merely decorative and trivial, and hence relegated to remain silent, current and progressive studies in the field of culture, art, literature, and history, particularly concerning women, highlight and magnify these 'trivia'- quilts, recipes and more. Bypassing or overcoming the wall of prejudices that segregated art into high and low forms, academia, as Bower writes, has begun to curate and comprehend recipes as artefacts that "served the communication needs of women" (5); as texts that enact within them "women's mental, theoretical, thoughtful positions and statements" (7). Bower explores the possibilities of reading recipes beyond their formulaic composition, to texts that incorporate "histories and personalities of their composers" (8).

Giving due credit to the entry of "feminisms" (9) into discursive spaces, Bower establishes how the exodus or shift from regressive emotions of fear and shame, to broader and brighter realms of acceptance and courage, has benefitted kitchens and women cooks. An overt display of interest in domestic life and cooking which they feared, would earn them the essentialised "feminine role" (9). This forced them to repress it, and replace it with an open and assertive embracing of kitchens and

cooking, seeking their "history, traditions, and voices in the kitchens" (9), as in other public spaces. The book investigates the power of cookbooks "to construct an ideology (national, regional, class, etc), to demonstrate the position of women behind private and public worlds" (12). Bower brings together several thoughts that prove recipes to be self-reflexive (14) texts that allow one to see "what the multiple 'truths' might have been, the multiple 'realities', the multiple 'experiences'" (14). She prods its readers to look beyond recipes, into the "lives and values of the people who put it together, reading the story they have bound together with the recipes" (14).

Bower's particular focus is on community cooks. In her essay "Cooking Up Lives: Narrative Elements in Community Cookbooks", her attempts to identify and establish the narrative elements inscribed in recipes, help her recognize how these texts stand "outside high cultures" (22) usually, and so in them we often find silenced women making a place to express some part of who they are, singly or as part of a group…a space in which women assert their values" (47). These self-representational texts, she says, helped women "construct their own stories" (29).

The permeations and permutations of cookbooks into other forms of writing has eventuated in and is still evolving into newer and hybrid forms of literature, of which Recipe Fiction is one. Recipe Fiction refers to novels which see a fusion of culinary recipes and fictional narratives. They blend the formats of a cookbook and a novel. This "mixture of referential discourse (the recipes) and fictional or reflective discourse" (Dunne 56) is an experimental kind and becomes a "gendered discourse" with folds of "female meanings" (Leonardi 131) held within. As Leonardi posits, "Many women can attest to the usefulness and importance of this discourse: mothers and daughters- even those who don't get along well otherwise, old friends who now

have little in common, mistresses and their "help", lawyers and their secretaries- all can participate in this almost prototypical female activity" (131). Sharing a recipe enacts a silent "trust between women" (135) and a bond of sisterhood. Just as the archetype of recipe implies a collective output, Recipe Fiction also emerges as a cooperative text, "belonging as much to the reader as to the writer" (130). As Katharina Vester mentions in her work *A Taste of Power: Food and American Identities,* a recipe, written in the imperative, "explicitly invites the readers to engage with the text instead of passively consuming it…he or she is directly and repeatedly addressed by the recipe and called into action" (9). It is this collaborative aspect of the recipe which renders the genre of Recipe Fiction a uniqueness of its own. It engages the reader to perform or try out what he/she reads, thereby creating a delightful and enriching nexus between the writer, the text and the reader. Recipe fiction therefore surpasses the other established narrative types by calling the reader to engage in action; in doing. Its way of infusing recipes into the narrative is an attempt "to include the reader as an active participant" (Leonardi 129). This call to action blurs the boundaries between thinking and doing; words and food; mind and body; male and female. It is, in other words, a 'complete' genre, achieved through a symbiosis of the traditional precepts of femininity and masculinity.

Helene Cixous in her essay "Sorties" pens her observations on the existence of binary codes which engender hierarchies. These binaries, according to Cixous set apart the feminine and the masculine, and reduces things to "hierarchical oppositions" (Dunne 57); "Superior/Inferior…couples" (57), "making all conceptual organization subject to man" (57). As different from Structuralists like Roland Barthes and others who try to build further on these binary codes by reading them as signs with meanings, Cixous and a host of feminists disregard these binary oppositions, and

disapprove of the privileging of one- invariably the masculine- over the other(feminine). Her argument is that such binary schema and the resultant categorisations foster the masculine, intellectual writing, and smother the feminine ecriture generated by women from their corpus of experience, largely at the domestic front. In another of her essays, "The Laugh of the Medusa", she lays this down by writing, "Women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, the rhetorics, regulations and codes, they must submerge, cut through, get beyond the ultimate reserve- discourse" (Cixous et al 886). What recipe fictional works accomplish through their format is this blurring of distinctions and binary divides between feminine and masculine text patterns. Though food is a neutral topic that finds universal connect, the making of it in the domestic spaces is often a gendered topic that associates with women. Hence, recipes as texts, as already described, are gendered feminine. Infusing them into the male bastion of fiction, deflates the idea of high and low; masculine and feminine. The presence of recipes in the narrative blurs "the margins between their fictional worlds and the reader's own world" (Dunne 61). Luce Irigaray's sexual metaphor when she describes woman as "neither one nor two" (26) explicates this "feminist writing circle" (Dunne 62) that encompasses the writer, the reader and the subject of food- all in one, and the blurring of borders by mixing discourses.

Recipe Fiction works are texts which try to bring back the lost charm of literariness into culinary discourses- particularly recipes, which have turned into scientific, matter-of-fact, rational texts in the modern times. The recipe novels try to read these discourses beyond the exactness of measurements suggested, and the preciseness of procedures recommended. They become "embedded discourses" (Leonardi 127) capable of unfolding layers of sub-textual readings within. As Nancy

Gray points out in her essay "Language Unbound", these are "forms of language most associated with the separated lives of women- spells, recipes, letters" and by reclaiming them the novelists are not merely reestablishing "women's language" (135), but attempting to dismantle the debilitating divides and distinctions. By clothing recipes within narratives, these novels in fact attempt not just to repurpose the genre to facilitate the articulation of women's voices from the kitchen but also subvert the notion of singular and autonomous authorship of texts.

Though food is the common foregrounded presence in all the four novels studied, they are by choice referred to in this thesis as Recipe Fiction, and not culinary fiction. The reason, as could be stated, is that the latter is a term which would simply refer to any novel with food and cooking as focus. However, in comparison, the former emerge as novels with the obvious presence and specific focus on the recipes infused into them with the intention of foregrounding the preparatory aspects of food, and the hands that prepare it. Recipe Fiction creates a sub-circle of novels within the larger circle of Culinary Fiction. While all are part of the latter as partakers of food, only some who cook are part of the former.

Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate* as translated by Carol Christensen and Thomas Christensen, Marsha Mehran's *Pomegranate Soup,* Maryline Desbiolles' *The Cuttlefish: A Novel* as translated by Mara Bertelsen, and Jael McHenry's *The Kitchen Daughter: A Novel* are analysed for study. All four novels share a similarity in format. Each one belongs to the genre of Recipe Fiction which combines recipes and narratives. Recipes are neatly placed in contexts and hence become the driving forces in each of the narratives. Esquivel, Mehran and McHenry structure their novels around multitudinous recipes whereas Desbiolles' narrative is centered on a single

recipe for stuffed cuttlefish. Three of the four novels are debut works by the respective authors. The choice of food for focus in these novels, may be justified by the intimacy and affinity that these women authors share with food, cooking and kitchen. They have selected their familiar terrain of kitchen and their accustomed act of cooking, for their narratives. It probably is this familiarity that has transferred itself to the theme of their writings. The protagonist-cooks are examined closely through the processes and patterns of cooking that they engage in, without delving much into the complex interstices and politics of race, class or religion that they are placed in.

Laura Alicia Palomares Esquivel, a Mexican by birth, published her debut novel *Like Water for Chocolate: A Novel in Monthly Installments with Recipes, Romances and Home Remedies* in 1989. It soon rose to a best-seller status within Mexico and across the globe in the years that followed. Though originally conceived as a screenplay, the work eventually took the shape of a novel before it was adapted into a film in 1993. The film amplified the popularity of the novel and led to the translation of the same into several world languages. It also secured ten Ariel awards and was nominated for the Golden Globe Award for the best film in the foreign film category. The novel won the ABBY (the American Booksellers' Book of the Year) award in 1994. It is a delectable romance with poignant undertones interspersed with magic and nourished with recipes. The elaborate banquet spread across the twelve months of a year offers a tasty array of savoury dishes cooked with emotions and memories.

The Law of Love published in 1996 was the English translation of Esquivel's Mexican novel *La Ley del amor.* In this second novel, she presents an amalgamation of Mexican and Mesoamerican cultural elements. A science fictional work, this novel

is often referred to as the first "multi-media novel" (Willingham 2) in which Esquivel effectively juxtaposes past and future- seventeenth century Mexico during Herman Cortes's conquest of the Aztecs, and the futuristic twenty-third century- though maintaining the same location. The narrative's uniqueness is furthered by the interpolation/ superimposition of comic panels and compact disc music recordings at specific points in the narrative. *Swift as Desire* was soon to follow in 2001, featuring a Mayan telegraph operator as its central character, who is depicted as possessing an uncanny skill to deduce the unarticulated messages and emotions of people whom he encounters. Esquivel's fourth novel *Malinche: A Novel* adorns a historical garb as it attempts a fictional documentation of the life, culture and profile of Malinche, through its central character Malinali.

Beginning her career as a primary school teacher and involving in theatre productions and workshops for children, Esquivel claims to have gathered a certain degree of enrichment that fed her interest in writing and inspired her to write her debut novel *Like Water for Chocolate.* In an interview given to Claudia Loewenstein in 1993, Esquivel has said, "I did theatre workshops and liked it mostly because children can analyse and try out things, children can rehearse. For example, they can project what they would *like* to be or how the world *could* be, as transformation. They can see not how the world is but how the child would like it to be. I feel that's very important as a means of communication" (Loewenstein and Esquivel 5). Tita, the protagonist of her first novel also does the same. When the repressive matriarch of De la Garza ranch sets down and imposes the brutal norm of spinsterhood on her youngest daughter Tita, the latter does not wail over her destiny but preserves the fire of passion for her lover Pedro till the end, against all odds and adversities. Choosing the kitchen for succor and cooking as the means, she turns the impossible into

possibilities- as how she wants it to be. A magical realist treatment of the events in the narrative assured a rousing reception for the novel when published. The popularity of the novel since 1989 and the readers' admiration for Tita has made Esquivel recreate her in her latest publication *Tita's Diary* in 2020. This handwritten text has much beyond recipes. It is rich with photographs, philosophy, pressed mementos and more, thereby presenting a fuller version of Tita's story through her own voice.

Como Agua para Chocolate, Esquivel's debut novel, was first published in 1989 in Spanish and was later translated into English by Carol Christensen and Thomas Christensen. The novel falls into the "boom femenino" (Bowskill 2) category of Spanish American women's writing. In one of her popular essays "Intimas Suculencias. Tratado filosofico de cocina" written in Spanish, Esquivel herself attempts to trace the lineage of Hispanic women writers who engaged with food, pleasure and knowledge in their writings. Though she does succeed in identifying a host of "literary foremothers" (Bowskill 19) like Ines Arredondo, Rosario Castellanos, Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz and more from her own culture, Esquivel's preoccupation and concern was more on devising the notion of "*neuva literatura*" (2) and articulating it through her novels.

By conceptualising *neuva literatura*, Esquivel envisaged liquidating the boundaries separating body and mind; domestic knowledge and written knowledge, and articulating food sensuality. Through this she envisioned "a revalorization of the kitchen space, a celebration of female sexuality and an end to gendered binary thinking" (2). As Bowskill observes, "In *Como Agua,* Esquivel tries to bridge the food-knowledge divide and create a neuva literature by showing how knowledge about food can be turned into written form. Thus Tita's culinary creations gain

longevity as a written text in the form of a recipe book" (5). *Like Water for Chocolate* was part of a larger agenda to embark on a "revisionary process" (3) as suggested by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, to identify "a female precursor who, far from representing a threatening force to be denied or killed, proves by example that a revolt against patriarchal literary authority is possible" (49). The same is further reiterated by Diehl when he writes, "In a culture where words are formed and assigned their dominant associations by men, women, in order to speak at all, must either subvert their own speech by using the patriarchal tongue or else seek for themselves experiences available only to women" (533).

Laura Esquivel's Mexican Fictions is a rich and resourceful work edited by Elizabeth Moore Willingham, compiling several critical interventions made into Esquivel's novels, particularly *Like Water for Chocolate.* Jeffrey Oxford attempts to study masculinities and men as portrayed in the novel, in his essay "*Unmasked Men: Sex Roles in Like Water for Chocolate*". Stephen Butler Murray studies the supernatural presences and otherworldly sources in this magic realistic novel. The book also brings to its readers' interesting perspectives on the gendered spaces and knowledge around "kitchenspace" (Christie 106) evolving from a parallel study of Esquivel's fictional Mexican landscape and the real structure and social scape of Mexico. Patrick Duffey examines how gender borders are inverted and sometimes crossed in the novel. He exposes how, in the novel, "Tita's culinary violence supplants the male violence of Revolutionary melodramas" (Esquivel 74), and subversions are enacted in it. Debra D. Andrist looks at how the novel places Esquivel in the category of women writers who emerge as "revisionist myth-makers" (121) by analyzing all the transformations and recreations that happen in her debut novel. In the introductory essay by the editor herself, she states how in the immediate years

after its publication the novel drew flak, as evident in the assessments by Antonio Marquet who described it as “simplistic, Manichean…childish…plagued with banal commonplaces, stripped of any defined stylistic aims, and having no other purpose than being a novelty” (Duffey 64).

The early scholastic explorations into the novel, assess its parodic treatment of forms and traditions, the fairy tale format and elements in its plot, the exaggerations and magical realist events, its hybrid genric structure, the inversion of gender, and the like. Judith Richards talks of Esquivel’s skillful handling of the elements from familiar and everyday terrain of the traditional and familial, and probes into the “metaphoric inscription of Tita’s spiritual female community” (Willingham 7). Later critics and researchers however embarked on a set of further complex and broader trajectories of the novel’s concerns. These inquests into and re-evaluations of the novel’s preoccupations were initiated by Kristine Ibsen by foregrounding the novel’s breach of boundaries, and its set of appropriations. Their enquiries were largely focused on the culinary and food-based elements in the novel. Kathleen M Glenn uses the scaffold of culinary criticism to study the novel. Tamas Heller examines how the elements of food, hunger and appetite shape and drive the characters and plot of the novel. Beatriz Gonzalez explores how the acts of appropriations and manipulations accomplish a resistance towards the traditional and repressive mechanisms of power that operate in the novel’s cultural landscape. Cecilia Lawless, through two of her essays, addresses the semiotics and purpose of cooking and surveys the “home-hearth environment” (Willingham 9) in the novel. She studies how kitchen emerges to be a “productive site” (Lawless 227) rendering articulative possibilities to women. She looks at kitchen as a locus of sisterhood and communality; “a space where Tita stakes out a private realm and a source of power and voice” (228). Donna M Mahon

foregrounds Esquivel's efforts to construct a feminine version of Mexican revolutionary history. Her study gives impetus to the "metalinguistic communication" (Willingham 10) in the novel, that operates through cooking.

Critics like Jeffrey M Pilcher, Kari S Salkjelsvik and Janice A Jaffe have focused on the cookbook format and recipe motif of the novel. When Pilcher cites the novel to give a historical account of the Mexican cookbook production, Salkjelsvik and Jaffe harbour on the possibilities embedded in the recipes within the narrative. They study recipe as a text, along with its creative and mutable probabilities.

A novel that evolved out of her own experiences in life, Marsha Mehran's *Pomegranate Soup* narrates the story of Marjan, Bahar and Layla, the three Aminpour Sisters, their arrival at the fictional Irish town of Ballinacroagh, the opening of their Babylon Café and their struggles for survival. Born in Tehran in 1977 and forced to flee her country with her family on the eve of the Islamic Revolution in 1979, Mehran's was a long, arduous, and continuous set of escapades from social, political and economic crises, coups and turmoils. Her nomadic relocations from Iran to Buenos Aires, and then to Miami, Australia, New York and Ireland left her unmoored and unsettled in life, with a yearning for a place to call home. What makes the novel distinct is the overwhelming presence of food and its role in facilitating the communication of emotions, memories, identities and more. The residents of Ballinacroagh, Ireland are categorised and presented through their attitude towards food offered by the Sisters from Iran. Despite the hostility and rancour of the property mogul Thomas McGuire and others like Dervla Quigley, the Aminpour Sisters gather a wave of support and warmth from a few Ballinacroaghans like Father Mahoney, Fiona and a few other characters. The boundless quantities of realism that is poured

into the narrative mould, is evident in the similarities shared by the lives of Mehran herself and her protagonists, the Aminpour Sisters. Mehran has once said in an interview, "I am a mixture of all three sisters, actually. There is a little of maternal Marjan, a bit of neurotic Bahar, and even a dash of the free spirit that guides Layla, in me" (*An Interview* 2). Also sometimes referred to as 'Iranian Chocolat' for its likeness to the French novel *Chocolat, Pomegranate Soup,* as Mehran admits, is a novel that holds "a happiness and vitality that is particular to Iranians, to Persian culture itself" (2). It is one which helps the "readers to smell and taste one of Iran's greatest contributions to the world: its delicate, perfumed cuisine" (2).

Inquiries done on *Pomegranate Soup* largely correspond to the multicultural dimension of the narrative, with due impetus placed on the culinary components. A.A.G. De Salazar's "Marsha Mehran and Multiculturalism in Irish Fiction" intervenes into the interstitial cultural spatiality engendered by the encounter of Iranian and Irish cultures as dramatised in Mehran's novel. Jennifer Gray, in her efforts to study the scope and effects of "culinary diplomacy" (2), has cited and studied several works of contemporary culinary fiction that narrate the lives of migrant women, particularly from the Middle East, to the West. Gray uses two of Mehran's novels- *Pomegranate Soup* and its sequel *Rosewater and Soda Bread* along with Joanne Harris's *Peaches for Monsieur LeCure* and Donia Bijan's *The Last Days of Café Leila* to elucidate how food forges bonds between cultures far and near. The gustemological and spatial dynamics which she brings together to link, open wider the multiple trajectories and dimensions of the culinary in Mehran's novel. The many cultural interpolations and affiliations of the key characters as projected through the culinary elements and acts in the novel, heighten the fundamentality of gastrodiplomacy. Gray's work follows a deconstructive methodology to achieve a

corrective to the common reductive representations of Eastern food and its exoticisation.

A transition from Mehran's world to Desbiolles', gives one's palate a sudden shift from Middle-Eastern flavours to the provencal French cuisine. Born in Savoy, Ugine in 1959, a place where her grandparents emigrated to, Maryline Desbiolles moved to the hinterland of Nice as a child, where she spent her days amidst the hills of Levens, aside from the summer holidays spent in the hills of Tuscany, with the maternal side of her family. Far from the crowded Parisian literary terrain, Desbiolles continues to live and write from the backcountry of Nice, largely in French. She drew attention on herself with her French novel *La Seiche* translated as *The Cuttlefish: A Novel,* in 1998, owing to its distinctive style, structure and narration. The controlled lyricism in her fiction calls for the continued acclaim given to her writings. Besides a recipient of the prestigious Prix Femina in 1999 for her novel *Anchise,* on old age and memory, Desbiolles has also ideated the creation of two poetry magazines- *Offset* and *La Metis* in 1980 and 1990 respectively.

As a person who has lived most of her life in the Nice backcountry where the Alps meet the Mediterranean, Desbiolles' writings are strongly inspired and fragranced by places and landscapes- particularly the hills and the mountains, and rarely the seascape. In a special issue of *Dalhousie French Studies* which brings together a collection of essays probing into the several experiments with spatial paradigms by writers, most notably French, Desblache analyses Maryline Desbiolles' writings which establish a close link between landscape and women's identity. Her environmental perceptions and themes, her depictions of nature, her particular bonds with the non-human, are meticulously studied by Desblache. Her article discusses the

bond between women's identity and environment by looking at the contemporary depictions of the same, and also looks at the notions of orality as depicted through the analogy between the female protagonist and the cuttlefish, in *The Cuttlefish: A Novel.*

Desblache's analyses are aligned along the study of the non-human presences and preoccupations in Desbiolles' works. She speaks of how Desbiolles' texts stand apart in the contemporary French literary landscape owing to how the elements of nature play a very pertinent role throughout them, and how they are largely treated as raw materials with their own worth rather than merely figurative entities. Desblache's readings centre on exploring how the natural world inspires Desbiolles' texts "as a presence that is part of day-to-day life and does not manifest itself as idealized or demonized visions of the non-human" (55); how her novels are richly endowed with nostalgic representations of nature; how her articulations contain a "spontaneous language of sensations which allows her and us to value diversity in totality and to see infinity in the finite" (61), and how her literary corpus "ingeniously dissolves some of the binaries responsible for perpetuating conventions which have become untruths" (61)

In one of his essays "The Epic of the Cephalopod", contained in the book *Feast and Folly: Cuisine, Intoxication, and the Poetics of the Sublime* which he has edited, Allen S. Weiss analyses Maryline Desbiolles' autobiographical fiction *The Cuttlefish: A Novel,* which is formatted like a cookbook. The recipe for the stuffed cuttlefish runs across the twelve chapters of the novel and becomes a symbol for creative and destructive forces in the author's life. Weiss's article studies how the kitchen and the cephalopod offer the narrator a space and means to meditate on her penchant to explore the unknown and its links to "her own origins and ends" (154).

He explores how every bit of the book makes cooking an allegory of the act of writing itself.

Jael McHenry's life in Philadelphia, close to an Italian market, she testifies, was so enriching an experience, as she was placed at a close proximity to a vast sea of edibles. This new exposure when fused with an innate love for cooking brought about the fruition of her debut novel, *The Kitchen Daughter: A Novel,* a sincere seed of her passion for food and cooking. The Italian families and shop owners in the locale showed her genuine gestures of tradition and identity, articulated through comestibles.

McHenry's protagonist was born out of her intention and desire to juxtapose and create a conundrum where food, a natural and presumed connector, fails to facilitate her social connections. McHenry constructs Ginny as an Aspergian who lacks the skill to use food to connect and converse with people. Her experience as a columnist and online food blogger helped McHenry modulate Ginny's voice and attain a fragmentation in her thoughts, words, and personality. McHenry testifies to an intense research behind her creation of Ginny to place her on the wide spectrum of Autism. Ginny's obsession with rules and patterns posed a major challenge to the author as it meant doing away with the usual and traditional narrative techniques which failed with her. Embedding in Ginny a defining paradox- the trauma of touch and the skill of cooking- was a characteristic feat that McHenry achieved through her novel. As a narrative that dismisses notions and definitions of a standard and absolute 'normal', suggesting in its place multiple normals and not a single one, establishing the truth that what is normal to one may be abnormal to another and vice-versa, *The Kitchen Daughter: A Novel* takes a polemical leap through its bold and emphatic pronouncement. By drawing up a protagonist who is at the extreme end of the strip

from herself, closed off from the world and failing in sociability standards, McHenry was taking up a considerable risk in characterisation; by trusting her with kitchen and cooking, she was intensifying the same.

Just as much as domestic cooking is considered a collective enterprise and tradition- largely feminine- there is also a latent, unacknowledged, individualist side to it, which moulds and shapes the female self who cooks, and eventuates in her transformation and elevation to an improved sense of self and agency. That is to say, that besides the well-organised cultural element that it holds, cooking has a subjective significance too, offering itself as an avenue for creativity and empowerment to the woman cook. By studying the four recipe novels from different cultural contexts, the study tries to dismantle the notion that domestic cooking is a "closed cuisine" (Swinbank 478) as against the creative and "open" (478) haute cuisine. It is an attempt to chart the embodied culinary acts of the female protagonists through which they accomplish their selves and desires. Beyond the "cultural hermeneutics" (Albala 74) of food contained in them, these texts are studied for the ways in which they represent cooking as a medium towards self-actualisation.

Aside from studies that focus on the epicurean effects, sensuous dimensions, nostalgic elements and cultural perspectives of food which are all invariably angled at the consumption of it, it is imperative to view things from the sooty side of the hearth as well. Even the idea of thinking ahead and planning a meal- whether we are buying requisites at the grocery store or choosing from an open refrigerator- David Livert opines in his work *A Psychology of Food, Cook, and Cooking*, requires a lot of preparation. He observes that all of these have been under-studied for years, for being just a day-to-day thing. Livert's book allocates a fair and equal space to the domestic

cook and the professional one and is a wealth of information on the existing and evolving corpus of psychological theories and studies done on cooking. The text, interestingly placed at the crossroads of food, cooking and psychology, keeps itself abreast by accommodating a post-COVID psychology of cooking, as well as being a part of a larger discursive concern about the future of cooking.

Cooking can be treated as a possible methodology to study the selves involved in the act. Any experience, as Ken Albala writes in his work *A Cultural History of Food in the Renaissance*, is best authenticated and studied when it is tried, experimented or reproduced. This uniqueness is embedded in recipe fiction as it facilitates the reproduction of the recipes infused into the narrative contexts, and allows the readers to relive or reimagine the contexts for themselves. Besides, Recipe Fiction is a compensatory intervention into the literary arena which has witnessed an unjust accreditation and accommodation of early writings on cooking. The early culinary writings were mostly by a male elite of literate gastronomes in place of the practicing female domestic cooks. These often failed in drawing up the real inside view of kitchens and ended up presenting a lopsided picture by their depictions of the varied dimensions of eating.

Recipes undoubtedly contain within them the experiential essence of countless generations of women cooks in the domestic front, their culinary wisdom transmitted orally from one generation to the next, until they were finally codified into written texts and printed cookbooks, making them “available for replication, testing and improvement within a community of cooks” (Mennell 67). However, as several critics attest, there are many “traditional women cooks” (Swinbank 468) who distrust “written recipes” (468), feeling that ““formalization did away with the personal

element"" (468). Hence, Recipe Fiction also gives room for breaches, improvisations and subversions of the given frame of recipes. Breaches entail only when there are directives and codes. Recipes, as given standards in cooking, seeking "culinary idealism" (Shapiro 3), are also therefore texts that trigger resistance and imply innovation.

A Culturalist footing adopted for the research, propels a plunge into the uncelebrated narratives emanating from the kitchen. The thesis argues that in the novels that are selected for study, the embodied, domestic culinary acts have the potential to articulate and transform their female protagonists, who, through them, accomplish and actualize their selves and desires. The sonority of the kitchen gets interpreted as the voice of the female cook adorning this space. The spatial dynamics in and around domestic kitchens, as represented in the selected narratives, are closely examined to explore the sensorial dimensions of the culinary act of cooking. Cooking is interpreted as a performance where the cook enacts the embodied knowledge that she possesses. The cook and her culinary methods are juxtaposed and studied on parallel planes, to exhume possibilities as to how the act yokes the cook and the cooked, subjecting both through a trajectory of transformation to emerge renewed and resuscitated. It seeks to study the notion of culinary mnemonics as it operates in the novels considered for study, and how these embodied memories shape the cooks' subjectivities. These memories prove to be vital components in their culinary enactments, helping to connect the past and the present. When recipes are placed within the ambit of these enactments, they become deciding discourses that perpetuate and validate cooking as identity assertion, either through easy compliance or through resistance.

Every cookbook contains an aesthetic and every recipe holds a history – personal, political, social, and cultural. Every recipe novel foregrounds a parallel between two creative processes – cooking and writing. Recipe novels bring before its readers, storied platters woven and laden with cuisines which have the potential to break silences. Through textual analyses, the research aims at an exploration of these layered narratives. It attempts to identify and understand the subversions and reconstructions of dominant stereotypes and spaces, and explore its prospects of rediscovering and reaffirming women's selves and identities. The recipes encased in the narratives are treated as embedded discourses which improve the possibilities of reading self-articulation, transformation and self-actualisation in and through food.

The thesis is divided into five chapters. The chapter following the Introduction will examine the attempts made by the women protagonists of the novels, at spatial reconfigurations of their domestic kitchen spaces. Titled "The Cook's Palette", the second chapter will explore the protagonists' methodology of reconceptualising the act of cooking to achieve a sense of agency and power. Through a critical and theoretical evaluation, the chapter seeks to interrogate the stereotyped gendering of both the space of kitchen and the act of cooking. The third chapter titled "Culinary Mnemonics" seeks to interpret cooking as an embodied epistemology of the self, tapping on the notion of cooking as a mnemonic activity which involves the mind and the body. The fourth chapter, "Delectable Defiances", will look at the structural and anecdotal arc of deviance in the selected novels. It seeks to make inroads to scrutinise the resistances enacted by the protagonist cooks through cooking, from within the intimate spaces of their kitchens.

The fifth chapter will draw up a conclusion by braiding together the observations and findings from the core analyses. It will try to sum up the major deductions gleaned and gathered from analyses rooted on the three key aspects of spatiality, mnemonics and resistances that shape the culinary acts. The last chapter places forth the recommendations and scope for further study in the domain.

Chapter 2

The Cook's Palette

Cooking meant taking charge of a piece of my life which I had left….It meant claiming control over matters touching on health, sensuous pleasure, social relations and- of course- identity. Once the culinary "should" and "should nots" began falling away, a vast playing field appeared before me- in which I could be athlete, artist, umpire, and audience: the game of cooking was about imitation, invention, and improvisation; it was about glorifying the ordinary and domesticating the exotic. (Friedensohn 241)

For most women, everyday domestic cooking is a language in the arena of her kitchen. She scripts her daily sojourn within this space, using her kitchen utensils and the raw ingredients gathered for the dishes which she prepares. She articulates herself through her recipes and dishes. The recipes, cookbooks, food journals and such of her fragmented jottings are a way of narrating her life. The chronicle of her life is deeply entwined with the culinary acts which she performs in the kitchen. Right from foraging, cleaning, peeling, dicing, grinding and garnishing, to the final act of laying a dish on the table, she enacts her own self. Much of the corpus of culinary literature- particularly culinary fiction and memoirs set in the domestic backdrop of home kitchens have women narrators and protagonists, unlike the ones in the professional setting of restaurants and cafes. The latter, as the term indicates, has professional cooking involving rigid rules and men unlike the former which is frequently treated as feminine and of women.

In everyday domestic world, the act of cooking is less rigid and more flexible. It is less professional and more personal. Annie Hauck-Lawson uses the term "food

voice" (1) to refer to domestic cooking, which she describes as "a powerful, highly charged, and personalised voice…that crystallises the dynamic, creative, symbolic, and highly individualised ways that food serves as a channel of communication" (22). This food voice modulates itself in different patterns. It is sometimes loud, bold, clear and even rebellious, and at other times gentle, passive and muffled often drowned out in a din of other oppressive and louder messages and expressions. They may be a gamut of food voices ranging from solo, collective, old, novel, traditional, modern, ethnic, gendered, spiritual, harmonious, discordant and more. Through her case study of Polish-American women, Hauck-Lawson establishes how for a woman, working in isolation in a domestic kitchen helps her express her individuality through cooking.

The act of cooking becomes a power generating activity for her which renders a voice to articulate her subjectivity (Hauck-Lawson 23). Food therefore is identified by Hauck-Lawson as a potent mode of communication- particularly at the level of preparation (23). Harking to these food voices from the kitchen helps us comprehend the essence of the discourse of quotidian cooking and understand how women infuse their selves into the dishes they make. It becomes a unique field of epistemology as it defies norms and rejects the rigidity of all the other reigning epistemologies. It aligns with the poststructuralist notion that there is no single prescribed way to construct identity/personhood. The food-related experiences of women in domestic kitchens are never the same and stable. They take multiple hues and flavours. Plurality defines the activities and experiences in the kitchen just as in everyday life in the world at large. The danger of failing to see and recognise variegations is contained in Desbiolles' protagonist's words when she says:

> It took me a long time to get used to that word *woman,* which included me since I, too, was equipped with all the ad hoc paraphernalia, including two magnificent orange ovaries. I knew very well that I was a girl and that I certainly would not turn into a man, but things were still fuzzy in my mind and I clung to this imprecision like animals cling to their shells, without which they would dry up in the sun…Let's just say I didn't hate the truth. But it seems to me that we lose sight of it by exposing it so deliberately, that we lose the contours, even the flesh and its subtle variations, and are left with nothing but the blow that's been dealt us- a bit like seeing all black after you stare straight into the sun. (5)

Kitchen therefore can be regarded as a microcosmic world by itself that defines and affects the women selves within. The variegated food-related experiences of these women aid to value the ordinary; the quotidian, which in reality often get undervalued and neglected by the dominant narratives of the world.

What comes under the purview of this chapter is an analysis of this oft-neglected and relegated, yet ought to be the most crucial side of the domestic realm. Marginalised as a subordinate and insignificant locus in the domestic realm, kitchen has remained a gendered place which best befits the 'subordinate' sex- women. Most frequent discourses on kitchen tag it as the rightful place for women. The dominant ideologies of the world have only been consistently reinforcing this gendered patterning of labour and lives across cultures. This gender bias is evident even in the architectural positioning of kitchen at the rear of home designs and never frontally.

The domestic kitchen often gets identified as a space of routine and ritual, one that both inscribes and reinforces particular gendered roles and responsibilities and

one in which "status is confirmed and exclusion practiced" (Floyd 62). What gets interrogated is the clichéd branding of kitchen as frivolous, petty and trivial, capable of sidelining even the individuals who occupy it, further to the fringes. Culinary literature which bases itself on the experiences emanating from this realm has not been ascribed its rightful share of attention and regard within the academic domain either. Advocating the need for the academic world to get over its disregard for the domestic kitchen and the culinary, Jeanne Schinto remarks that culinary history is "a lively but still relatively new academic field" (16) and it "isn't only the study of old recipes and ways of cooking" (Kelly 254). Deeply inscribed within the pages of these culinary writings are the stories of food and food preparers; of the cook and the cooked. They are to be read beyond the tangible ingredients of a recipe to the larger intangible ingredients of the associated lives; the embedded cultural, social, familial and personal stories of women. Women's culinary writings are often intensely authentic articulations from their own space in the domestic realm; their own room; their kitchen:

> Women's identities are frequently linked with a sharp sense of spatial awareness which begins, in feminist terms, with the stark binary: confinement/freedom. From Virginia Woolf's seminal "room of one's own" (1929) and "les lieux (d'ecriture) de Marguerite Duras" (1978, 1993), to progressive re-conceptualizations of the domestic and public spheres or liberating creations of fictional landscapes and utopias, the history of female-authored theory and fiction is strewn with examples of the re-appropriation and re-imagining of space. Intellectually invigorating concepts such as the *entre-deux* and the nomadic subject continue to challenge spatial norms, providing new cognitive places to inhabit and renewing women's sense of

> situatedness. In sum, developments in feminine spatial thinking and practice are an integral element in much of the most influential women's writing of the twentieth century and beyond. (Barnet and Jordan 3)

Western traditions and philosophy has always maintained a bias towards the abstract and the transcendent, and an indifference and disinterest towards the bodily and the concrete. Attempts have always been to encode things using rationality and logic and to discipline the aspects of life using theories which precisely became activities of "reducing temporal events by abstract, disembodied, atemporal schemata" (Curtin and Heldke 3). There developed the trend of binary thinking which stayed on to be fundamental to Western thinking. Western academia takes after Plato's philosophy which represents the world in terms of dualisms and what Theodore Adorno termed as the "logic of identity" or "identity thinking" (5) which identified the process of categorical thought that interprets everything in abstract terms, neglecting the scope of individuality and uniqueness.

Popular dualisms are visible in the pairing of mind and body, self and other, good and evil, nature and culture, reason and emotion, and the like which get neatly segregated into different domains that are set in opposition. What aligns with the abstract and the atemporal often gets defined as public, masculine, and universal, marginalising the side that aligns with the concrete and the corporeal. Dualisms of these kind are responsible for the disregard and the philosophical disinterest towards food and food-related practices. Besides the ontological aspect, food is underrated due to its nature of ephemerality, easily subject to decay and disintegration. Tita in *Like Water for Chocolate* is heard to say, "When the talk turns to eating, a subject of the greatest importance, only fools and sick men don't give it the attention it deserves"

(Esquivel 143). There exists a lopsided privileging of the spiritual and the mental above the physical and the bodily. What needs to be duly acknowledged and examined are the "physical, transitory and completely ordinary" (Curtin and Heldke4) experiences of our lives which to a large extend contribute to the construction and reconstruction of our selves.

Ordinary experiences include not just the experiences of the marginalised persons but also the marginalised experiences of the dominant persons. This therefore calls attention to the women who are relegated and marginalised to the gendered space of kitchen and the general humanity which underplays and marginalises their own act of consumption/eating. The latent dynamics here is that when one eats, the act of eating is consciously devalued to not even be ascribed the status of an experience. And when eating is deliberately downplayed and unacknowledged, they automatically understate the lives of those who are involved in the act of preparing that food too- the ones responsible for their food, and their own bodily aspects of life. The underrated essence of the ordinary needs to be re-evaluated and this is accomplished in this thesis through an analysis of the ordinary acts of cooking and consumption which attain transformational dimensions and are proven to be pertinent in their own ways. These acts suggest the possibility of change and hence prove to be liberating.

Food possesses the potential to bust the dichotomies and the associated hierarchies and hegemonies that persist in the Western epistemologies. It poses a threat to the governing oppositions with regard to "male/female, art/science, or time/space" (Batstone 47- 48). Food and cooking defy the organisation of experiences in terms of binaries. Claude Levi-Strauss reinstates the nature of food to defy binary

categorisation when he examines its refusal to accommodate itself on either side of this dichotomous framework- neither nature nor culture- but encompassing both. Buddhist philosophy describes the human being as a "psychophysical personality" (Curtin and Heldke 18) that resists the idea of dualism which analyses the mind and body as separate and distinct. Buddha "was not prepared to assume that mind (*nama*) can have independent status or existence. It is always associated with a body or a physical personality" (18).

Curtin observes that in Buddhism, mind and matter are processes of experience. Buddha puts forward the five aggregates- material form, feeling/sensation, perception, dispositions and consciousness that make up the self- a continuity of experience and not a constant, single autonomous identity. These aggregates are contingently connected processes of ordinary experience. Buddha's understanding of dispositions is particularly suggestive in relation to food. A disposition is "that which processes material form, feeling, perception, disposition (itself) and consciousness into their particular forms. Dispositions groom our physical personality" (18-19). They are mind/matter determinants of what we make. They are not mind acting on the external world, but are inherently involved in it- they participate in it- in a relation of co-dependence. Both feminist and Buddhist perspectives embrace the idea that a self is defined through a participatory process of mutuality and co-dependence. We come to be as persons by shaping the world according to our dispositions, as it reciprocally shapes us. This notion of a relational self implies that in humble spaces like the kitchen we can expect deep meanings embedded, about the value of life. Meanings can be found in ordinary everydayness and domestic corners and not necessarily always in elite, transcendental realms.

With the advent and growth of feminism, particularly the second wave, there emerged a rising chorus and call to reject kitchen in order for women to be liberated and independent, implying that it was women's entwined relationship with food andher engagement with the preparation of it that denied her mobility. Though these feminist theories of female subjectivity and agency are meant to raise consciousness and liberate a woman from the patriarchal, socially constructed, restrictive and oppressive places assigned to women, yet they do not seem to embrace and accommodate the women outside of the academic circles- the ordinary women who belong to the non-academic world where textual knowledge does not directly influence their everyday lives and whose claims of self-agency are not even verbal oftentimes. Kitchen and cooking, a place and an activity that most women remain and engage in, have the potential to effectively bridge the gap between academic theoretical discourses about female subjectivity and quotidian practices of female agency. The social and philosophical dimensions of cooking illustrate how female subjectivity and acts of agency can be performed even within the 'ordinary', non-academic, domestic space of the kitchen.

As binary thinking reigns the Western epistemologies and philosophies, what gets coded male manifests itself in actions, constant changes, explorations, creations, or as feminist geographer Doreen Massey calls, of always "Becoming" (168). What is coded feminine are the opposite of these qualities. If the kitchen is a woman's place, its walls limit her social, economic, and personal mobility, which derives from conceptualising place as a fixed, unchanging, and nostalgic location. Massey underlines the gender conundrum contained within this theoretical paradigm of place. She argues that the characteristic connected with place as "stable…resonated with ways of characterising" (119-120) the social role of women in our culture. Place as

"comfort of Being" (119) rather than as a "project of Becoming" (119) (of changing) is coded feminine. In other words, women are in a constant state of simply "Being" (123) while men are in a constant state of creating, of changing, of "Becoming" (123), implying and allowing mobility and progression. For Massey, place "in this formulation [is] necessarily an essentialist concept which [is] interpreted as the comfort of Being instead of forging ahead with the (assumed progressive) project of Becoming" (119). Since place lacks progress, the feminist rejection of the kitchen as a woman's place implied a refusal to situate women in the non-progressive, static place of a kitchen. A woman's liberation from the kitchen as her place, therefore, would mark her right to divorce herself from the limitations embedded in the daily, and often mundane, responsibility of quotidian work. Once divorced from this constrictive place, a woman will engage in the project of Becoming.

Both place and space interconnect in kitchen politics. The connection of place with home, the place of home, centres this discourse. The main concerns are the association of home with a nostalgic view and moral, social values that must remain fixed throughout time (the comfort of Being) in order to combat the unpredictable, competitive, and aggressive lifestyle produced in the public sphere of the workplace (the project of Becoming). Furthermore, home becomes a location of leisure and comfort, at least in ideological terms, seemingly making the place of home a fixed and stable site.

Feminist architects and geographers of more recent times work with a more complex notion of place. They see it not as "a set of coordinates on the map" (McDowell 4) but as "contested, fluid, and uncertain" (4), which is defined by its "socio-spatial practices and power relations" (4). A home's ideological currency as a

stable place of relaxation is evident by its absence from philosopher Michel Foucault's influential theory on the concept of "other places" (4), where he explores social sites that might subvert institutional policing and control over citizens. Foucault's theory excluded the house, for he sees it as a place of rest. However, even when home is a mandatory social place for women, to provide a site of rest for others, it would be necessary to distinguish kitchen from the rest of the home and treat it as an autonomous space that renders women the liberty and luxury to follow and impose their will and to affirm their selves. Kitchen does qualify as a "heterotopia" (Foucault 4) - one that exists in the borderline between a "heterotopia of crisis" (5) and "heterotopia of deviation" (5), and is seen in the novels under study. As place does carry a patriarchal ideology baggage, when women define the kitchen as their space they engage in their own everyday acts of agency. Barbara Cooper who argues that:

> thinking about how women move through space,…may help feminist theorists find a new and revitalising point of entry into the question of female agency…how women contribute to the gradual transformation of gender relations not simply through conscious manipulation, resistance, or protest but also through the active spatial positioning in which they engage in their everyday lives in an effort to define themselves socially and to improve their lives materially. (Ahrentzen 193-194)

As geographer Linda McDowell says, "Although the house and the home is one of the most strongly gendered spatial locations, it is important not to take the associations for granted, nor to see them as permanent and unchanging" (93). Shifting the kitchen from a woman's place to a woman's space requires that we think of new forms to the very concept of home itself.

Kitchen, the epicentre of the domestic realm, is integral to a woman's life, as it reveals much and most of the personal aspects of her life. Along with the secret and special and sometimes even the most ordinary of ingredients that are exchanged in this space, anecdotes of their lives too are shared by women here. Sitting around the kitchen table or standing around the kitchen counter often becomes the most comfortable space and posture for women to narrate their life stories. Women derive a pleasure and power from this act of sharing their life stories through their recipes and their enactments and re-enactments. Pearl Bailey, entertainer and cookbook author, in her work *Pearl's Kitchen: An Extraordinary Cookbook* speaks of her deep connection with the kitchen. She says, "I don't like to say that my kitchen is a religious place, but I would say that if I were a voodoo priestess, I would conduct my rituals there" (21). She adds, "I want to try to communicate why I cook….I cook because emotionally it is necessary for me to cook, and I want to explore this mystical satisfaction, this meaning and joy that comes from my activities in the kitchen" (Kelly 252).

In Black women's experience, according to Gloria Wade-Gayles kitchens are "temples where wounds of oppression, often inflicted by the white women in the kitchens where Black women laboured, were healed by creating wonderful food and finding the space to bond with each other" (Avakian 8). Some women do not like to cook, yet they still "make the kitchen their 'space' as they articulate why they dislike cooking" (Abarca 28). Though variegated, these experiences reinstate the idea that a kitchen is probably one of the most integral spaces in a woman's life. As Carole Counihan says, "For many women (and some men), food is a significant voice of self-expression. In the meals they cook, the rituals they observe, and the memories they preserve, women communicate powerful meanings and emotions" (*Food and Culture* 174).

Home sphere has often been associated with tradition, nourishment, safety, consistency, morality and the like. When the binary divide pervades all aspects and realms of life, the private sphere gets pitted against the public sphere. As Foucault writes in his "Of Other Spaces":

> Despite all the techniques for appropriating space, despite the whole network of knowledge that enables us to delimit or to formalise it, contemporary space is perhaps still not entirely desanctified (apparently unlike time, it would seem, which was detached from the sacred in the nineteenth century). To be sure a certain theoretical desanctification of space has occurred, but we may still not have reached the point of a practical desanctification of space. And perhaps our life is still governed by a certain number of oppositions that we regard as simple givens: for example between private space and public space, between family space and social space, between cultural space and useful space, between the space of leisure and that of work. (2)

Ideological associations further complicate the nature of these domains. The private, often viewed as a source "of stability, reliability and authenticity" (Massey 180) gets coded female and feminine, reinstating women's nature, role and responsibility as ideal providers and nurturers. Geographers Mona Domosh and Joni Seager in *Putting Women in Place: Feminist Geographers Make Sense of the World* explains how when capitalism began to emerge:

> The separation of a masculine world of work and production from a feminine world of family and reproduction was essential to its structure….This system required a commitment to hard work and competition in the marketplace, and at the same time required the behind-the-scenes care and nurture of family and

> children and the unpaid maintenance of the physical (and psychological) needs of the workers. (5)

This capitalist, structured separation of spheres values a woman's social role as nurturer and ensures her stay within the comfort of Being, curtailing her mobility and restricting her from the project of Becoming.

Attempts have been and are being made to contest this convenient linking of home, traditionalism and stability to women and tagging and coding them as essentially and 'naturally' feminine and of being female. However, most of these attempts have been designed and formulated by a feminist ideology which has rendered food a negative connotation by focusing largely on eating disorders and victimisation of women. They have only shied away from kitchens and cooking, terming them as oppressive and "symbols of subservience rather than pleasure and fulfillment" (Avakian 68). The novels under study prove the possibilities embedded within kitchen. The attempts of the protagonists are not to seek mobility and agency by shunning the kitchen but by embracing it and appropriating it to their needs.

Though the functional aspect of the kitchen within the design and layout of a house merely interprets it as a place where food is prepared and stored, yet the true form and function of a particular space is defined and determined by the ways in which the individuals inhabiting it conduct their lives within and from there. Spaces occupied by human beings gain meaning by the kind of social life within them, a life that "consists of exchanges, encounters, conflicts, and connections with one another; and where human interaction is…of individuals relating to each other in the flow of daily life" (Ahrentzen 189). Instead of a kitchen 'containing' a woman's identity, a woman can construct a kitchen that helps her in creating her own identity by

recalibrating and reconfiguring the social dimensions and functions of that space; by making it her social space. Hence, though a community's ideological system presets a kitchen's social and cultural function, the self who cooks can breach the boundaries of it and accomplish and actualise itself. Even though it is architecturally assumed to be fixed and static a locus, the abstract theoretical models can destabilise the established fixities and render it a fluidic identity and form. Feminist architect Diana I. Agrest indicates in *Architecture from Without: Theoretical Framing for a Critical Practice* of a possibility to configure "spaces beyond" their "form and functional aspects" (7).

French philosopher Henri Lefebvre in his study *The Production of Space* says that "architecture picks a site in nature and transforms it to the political realm by means of symbolic mediation" (33) which he argues, establishes a form of "knowledge and power" (33) by prescribing gender production divisions and gender social codes. Feminist architects trace this symbolic mediation within house designs where "the rooms associated with men are always focused at the front of the house- the high- status, 'public' section of the house- while rooms which have historically been associated with women, such as the kitchen, are hidden away at the rear of the house" (Bell and Valentine 72).

The dynamics of the dichotomous divide of front/back, public/private exposes gender politics and manifests the boundaries encountered by women in their efforts to emerge from the concealed kitchens at the rear of houses. It is here that Meredith Abarca's concept of the "borderless boundary zone" (24) becomes significant, as it addresses women's ability to carve out a niche for themselves and achieve and actualise themselves within the privacy of their home kitchens sans any overt, physical transgressions or breach of borders. Her metaphor helps understand the

kitchen as a woman's own space which she embraces and not evades. Their reconceptualisation of kitchen helps the protagonists of the novels to reach beyond the kitchen by staying within the kitchen. This reconceptualisation takes on multitudinous manifestations and leads to an array of social spaces based on the milieu and context.

Taking off from Kate Millet's premise in *Sexual Politics,* that male supremacy is not inscribed in their physical strength but in the acceptance of it by women, it gets easier to understand how it becomes possible for women to read redemption through cooking and kitchen as it promises them myriad possibilities and room for individual agency. Kitchen may be categorised as private, personal and female, but it is a site that has multiple meanings and functions embedded within. The protagonists' selves extend beyond, without resorting to any violent upheavals or physical encounters, to draw the social spaces towards them. The kitchen becomes their social space which they take possession of. They translate the kitchen from a place to a space. Feminist architects and geographers hold the view that a person experiences a sense of place through their body, their senses and their emotions. They speak of creating spaces that offer "experiences that correspond to, provide models for, the experience of the body, give validity to a sense of the self as bodily- a sense that may be shared by both the sexes" (Fausch 40).

Abarca's concept of the borderless boundary zone identifies the blurring of binaries and divides, where the ideologies of space and place mutually connect. This zone is created when individuals recognise the possibility and their potential to mould a place into their requirements and to determine its nature by their acts. Its meaning is the "presence of individuals in [a] space" (Abarca 24) for they "determine its nature" (24). Hence, kitchen which largely gets branded as a place of entrapment is

determined to become a space of empowerment by the individuals who occupy it. This appropriation of the kitchen space is accomplished through constant redefinitions of the meaning of cooking. This is in contrast to the static, stable, non-progressive and unchanging connotations of place, which often gets associated with a state of being, and hence fails to imply change, growth or transformation.

The novels under study hold relevance owing to the fact that they counter the popular portrayal of kitchen as a place of social entrapment that becomes debilitating for women, and the outcry to evacuate the kitchen to seek liberation. Though these women protagonists physically remain within the kitchen, they articulate through food and cooking and thereby achieve visibility and audibility. What patriarchy and feminism disapproves and invalidates, is validated from, through and by the kitchen. The protagonists of the novels change the oppressive phenomena that stifle them and lift themselves out of these subjugating circumstances through cooking. They reach a "level of conscientizacion" (27) and hence strategise their kitchen and cooking to liberate themselves from their predicament; from a sense of incarceration.

In *Pomegranate Soup,* the fleeing of the Aminpour Sisters was an escapade from political turbulence and cultural silencing, in search of a haven of peace and freedom. This was a resistance towards an attempt to pin them down to a state of being within chadors. What they seek and expect in Irish Ballinacroagh where they reach, far away from their native Iran, is the security and warmth of a home. However, Ballinacroagh only 'appears' to be calm and pleasant. Behind its mask/façade of peace, the place and its people nurture a hostility to anyone and anything that is foreign. Yet with the dishes the Aminpour Sisters prepare in their kitchen, they bring about miraculous transformation in the people who partake of it.

Cooking is their attempt to recreate home away from their geographical home. The treacherous cordiality which is put up by Ballinacroagh, is easily broken by the many dishes ranging from elephant ears, abgusht, fesenjoon to pomegranate soup which Marjan and her sisters prepare in their Babylon café on the Main Mall. “The glint of the samovar and the smell of frying elephant ears were reasons enough for most to step inside” (Mehran 135).

The enticing and exotic aromas pierce through and enter the being of Ballinacroaghans, causing a transformation in them. Father Fergal Mahoney, the first one to enter the Babylon Café, lured by these euphoric smells allows himself once again to entertain his comedic ambitions, his genuine desire. He is driven to script “a two-act play dedicated to the pleasures of the mind and the body” (187). Father Mahoney “knew that he was a very different man from a half hour ago” (123). He says, “I have never in all my years travelling, tasted anything as divine” (125).

Malachy too “had never known there to be such joy in cooking, subjected as he was to the gristly pork sausages and limp carrots of his usual home meals” (162). The sisters transform the erstwhile Delmenico’s Pastry Shop with its putrified powdery mounts of flour and dough into a true oasis of refreshing and rejuvenating food. In their new locale:

> Marjan worked her magic over both men and women in a more practical, yet equally intriguing manner. Through her recipes Marjan was able to encourage people towards accomplishments that they had previously thought impossible, one taste of her food, and most would not only start dreaming but actually contemplate doing. (123)

And as the character Fiona is heard to say, “Look at what you have done! This café, your food- now that is something. This town does not know how lucky it is” (181).

Ginny in *The Kitchen Daughter: A Novel,* faces the trauma of her parents’ unexpected and sudden death in a car accident. The all too abrupt loss of their comforting presence draws from her, ‘strange’ behaviour which is read as part of her Asperger’s Syndrome and interpreted as an abnormalcy. In the wake of the loss of people who knew her well and dealt well with her, it is a real struggle for Ginny to convince her only sister, of her capacities. Amanda’s agenda of selling their house strikes yet another huge blow on Ginny’s face. What helps Ginny survive amidst this struggle is her culinary knowledge- knowledge and skill which her mother had helped her acquire when she trusted Ginny with the knife and other kitchen tools.

The kitchen space is a comforting space for Ginny. It offers her a refuge as she runs to it in the face of each of her sorrows. She cooks dishes, each time following hand-written recipes to the last word and invoking the ghost presences of individuals who owned the recipes. Not only does she get to know more of herself but also of people related to her, from them. This journey of self- discovery helps her fight back all the attempts to restrict and contain her within the walls of a state of being- of the ‘not so normal’ tag; a girl with a syndrome. Cooking helps her resist the societal attempts of ‘othering’ directed towards her and firmly affirm herself at the end as the way she is.

A visible progression is on display in Desbiolles’s novel too, as its protagonist prepares a stuffed cuttlefish and in the process stuffs all her past trauma, sorrows and bitterness, all her fear into the mollusc and finally manages to put it over fire, making it ready for consumption, so that she emerges as a new/changed self with no facades

and pretences, whether forced or voluntary, free of all masks, true to her real, genuine self. Tita too, in *Like Water for Chocolate,* fights her repression at the De la Garza Ranch at the hands of her own mother Mama Elena. When the tradition curtails her from marrying her lover Pedro and causes her to lose him to her own sister Rosaura, she starts communicating her repressed emotions through the food she prepares. For Tita, food- not the consumption of it, but the preparation of it- is power. Tita refuses to be silent and powerless as she prepares power with her own hands and controls her life by directing things the way she desires. Tita experiences a rare and strange sense of fulfilment with every dish she prepares, as she pours in her emotions and communicates through her desires. What is denied to her is achieved in cooking, wherein she performs herself. It is a way of articulation for Tita, who is otherwise calm, docile and passive.

Desbiolles's protagonist emerges a transformed being as she gets over the fears of articulating her true self. This is evidently shown in her intention behind cooking stuffed cuttlefish. She says, "You are never as transformed as when you are cooking. Are we not, thanks to cooking, able to swallow what we were not even able to look at?" (13). Marjan and her sisters make kitchen a therapeutic site as they rebuild a home for themselves, away from turbulences in their home country. The Babylon Café offers a secure zone of warmth and hope. Cooking there is an act of homecoming for them. Bahar who carries wounds from her past life inside and outside her body, also undergoes changes, though gradual, and emerges anew, confident and free at the end of the narrative. Marjan's healing and nurturing power is felt in her dishes which often become remedies that cure Bahar of her pains. "Marjan was the humble servant of so many magical dishes" (Mehran 41-42) with their "fantastic bounty of tastes and colours" (32). The torshi vegetables that Bahar

prepares for the charity fete, though initially reminds her of the sad plight of being pickled to stay the same (in a state of 'being') for long, later speaks to her of the positive aspect of life- the survival; the resilience. Despite the assault of vinegar, torshi vegetables somehow manage to survive their pickling period. And that is what she wanted to be- a survivor, dreading nothing.

In *The Kitchen Daughter: A Novel,* Ginny appropriates kitchen and turns it into her comfort space. By invoking the dead people through cooking their recipes, she cooks up a chance to interact with them which she is otherwise unable to. These cooking episodes are her manipulated acts to communicate and know more; attempts to discover and recover the unknown aspects of her own self and her family. Kitchen spaces take on different format in each of the narratives chosen. In *Like Water for Chocolate* it becomes a resistance site, in *Pomegranate Soup* it becomes a therapeutic site, in *The Kitchen Daughter: A Novel,* it becomes a recuperative site and in *The Cuttlefish: A Novel* it becomes a restorative site. Just as the space of kitchen, the act of cooking also carries a multitude of meanings to the persons involved, as is evidenced by the protagonist's words in *The Cuttlefish: A Novel*:

> Cooking exalts, irritates, calms, and reconciles me. Bores and enchants. Disgusts. Never ceases to surprise. So many colours, smells, consistencies to infinitely intertwine. So many tastes to fit together, to extract, so many tastes to extol, to bend to our will, to convince to swell, and to anoint our mouths. So many rules, so many habits, so many surprises. (Desbiolles 95)

Not only is power vested in the act of cooking but also in the food that is prepared. The woman cook extends herself to the world outside her kitchen, through her dishes. All who partake of it, are affected by it. So much is the power of cooking

that she is able to control the selves around her too, with her food. Gertrudis in *Like Water for Chocolate,* Father Mahoney in *Pomegranate Soup,* the unnamed protagonist of *The Cuttlefish: A Novel* are all evidences for this effect. After eating off the quail in rose petal sauce prepared by Tita:

> Gertrudis was really stricken; her whole body was dripping with sweat. Her sweat was pink, and it smelled like roses, a lovely strong smell…Her body was giving off so much heat that the wooden walls began to split and burst into flame…By then the scent of roses given off by her body had travelled a long, long way…Juan…A higher power was controlling his actions…The aroma from Gertrudis' body guided him…Gertrudis stopped running when she saw him riding toward her. Naked as she was, with her loosened hair falling to her waist, luminous, glowing with energy, she might have been an angel and devil in one woman. The delicacy of her face, the perfection of her pure virginal body contrasted with the passion, the lust that leapt from her eyes, from her every pore…Each year Tita prepared it in tribute to her sister's liberation. (Esquivel 53-55)

It is a similar sense of liberation that is effected by Layla on Tom Junior in *Pomegranate Soup.* "Layla had shown him what he could do, what he could be without the shadow of his father looming over him" (Mehran 256). Layla always "had a way of raising expectations beyond the ordinary" (13) and her signature scent of rosewater and cinnamon translates into the smell of independence for Tom Junior. He experiences "a renewed sense of being" (328). Benny Corcoran, hit by Layla's perfume, "relives the ambitions of their idle youths; dreams that were once entertained behind closed doors as they rubbed away under sweaty teenage quilts-

moments of pure self-indulgence" (46-47).The same food can also however act as an emetic upon people who eat of it with a lack of trust, as with Rosaura and Mama Elena in *Like Water for Chocolate*, Thomas McGuire in *Pomegranate Soup.* The first smells from the Babylon Café were "spicy, sinful intonations reeked of an unknown evil…set off alarm bells in Thomas' potato head" (3). Mythically the most lustful aroma of the erotic mixture of cardamom and toasted almonds fails to have any "amorous effect" (77) on Thomas McGuire. The scent of it "tied his bowels into a disturbed knot" (77). Mama Elena in Esquivel's novel asks the doctor who comes to treat her at the ranch to lock the door and is heard to confide in him her suspicions about the bitterness of the food. She says, "They're putting something in my food-curiously enough, just since Tita came back. I want you to test it" (Esquivel 121).

Women in kitchen become critical thinkers in their own right, using the language of food to formulate their theories. They narrate their lives in the daily preparation of meals. These are acts of agency through which they assert their subjectivity. Feminist scholars contend that the kitchen, traditionally designated as a woman's domain, functions as a site where patriarchal norms reinforce women's emotional, physical, spiritual, and economic vulnerabilities, thereby perpetuating the notion that a women's 'rightful' place is within the domestic sphere. Ksenija Bilbija in her essay "Spanish American Women Writers: Simmering Identity over a Low Fire" remarks, that for feminists, "the kitchen has come to symbolize the world that traditionally marginalized and limited a woman. It represents a space associated with repetitive work, lacking any "real" creativity, and having no possibility for the fulfillment of women's existential needs, individualization or self-expression" (61). However, Abarca argues that the same can be a space of agency when read beyond the concrete dimensions of a mere room within a house's architectural design. This

view brings out the juxtaposition of kitchen as a space of freedom against a place of obligatory labour.

By its very nature, kitchen blurs and rejects the binary oppositions and categorisations of Western epistemologies and hence becomes a space where more than one perspective can coexist. It is a space that can hold contradictions when it can simultaneously be a place of oppression and a space where patriarchal regulations are sometimes subverted to achieve empowerment and liberation. Alice McLean writes that the domestic has often been understood as a conflicted space. She says, "It is a site of women's oppression, where women are constrained and contained to the roles assigned to them in the patriarchy, but at the same time it encompasses a private realm where they have much more power than in the male-dominated sphere" (McLean 250).

In *Race, Class and Gender,* Esther Ngan-Ling Chow indicates that the "homeplace and community [are] sites of contradiction and contested terrains where opposing forces are intricately interwoven into women's everyday lives" (xxiii). Sometimes the kitchen also evokes the image of Virginia Woolf's "room of one's own" (1) where it offers itself as a survival space to overcome the subordinating gendered social practices, and becoming one of the "unique spaces" (Belen i) "of female autonomy" (Carolina 37).When one explores the ideological meanings that produce the notion of place, one sees that in the fields of geography and architecture, traditionally to a great extent a patriarchal and capitalist agenda defines the social meaning of place as usually representing the physical and stable boundaries of a location. The kitchen as a woman's space can represent a site of multiple, changing levels and degrees of freedom, self-awareness, subjectivity and agency. The social

interactions of daily life that unfold within a given space define its significance. Women can transform the ideologies embedded in the construction of the kitchen as their place into their own social space. They transform kitchen from a stultifying place into an empowering space.

Catharine MacKinnon observes that women's distinctive experience as women occurs within spaces that have been "socially lived as the personal- private, emotional, interiorised, particular, individuated, intimate" (247). In the context of slavery, it is interesting to note how the Black women's subversive kitchen strategies helped them to navigate and circumvent the atrocities of slavery. Mary Titus observes, "The kitchen became a place where black authority could be established and could threaten the [white] household at its very centre..." (16). The kitchen was deliberately detached and shifted from the rest of the household as a means to de-centre the underlying Black hold and upper hand over it, and to avert a possible threat posed by the Black slaves. As John Michael Vlach points out, "the detached kitchen was an important emblem of hardening social boundaries and the evolving society created by slaveholders that increasingly demanded clearer definitions of status, position, and authority" (43). Yet, kitchen offered Black women a creative space, cooking their way "into the hearts, minds, and stomachs of a country" (Titus 18). They negotiated their way through, towards self-empowerment. Kitchen could not only be a space offering nurturance and sustenance in the hands of these women, but could also turn into damaging and destructive spaces as they could choose to adulterate the food they prepare for their White masters or sometimes even grind emetic ingredients into it.

The dynamics between White and Black women in the system of slavery places in special focus the ways in which the kitchen has served as an arena where

women have exercised their power and creativity. Through their creative nurturance from within the kitchen, these black women shaped out spaces for themselves; spaces of resistance which extended beyond the place of kitchen, spaces that helped redefine themselves; spaces that aided the transformation of their selves and transcended oppressive locations. The cultural space of kitchen animated their leap beyond the strangling oppressive fetters and enabled their self-transformation. Olga Idriss Davis in her essay "In the Kitchen: Transforming the Academy through Safe Spaces of Resistance" uses the term "kitchen legacy" (365) to refer to these agential culinary acts of the Black women which entails transformation of their servitude and oppression to resistance and liberation. The legacy of the kitchen was for Black women, "a rhetorical strategy for negotiating the outrage of discrimination, inferiority, and most importantly, white superiority" (372). It unifies the private and the public spheres, thought and action, and facilitates an interdependence of what one thinks of oneself and what one does to actualise that self/identity. bell hooks in her essay "Homeplace: A Site of Resistance" observes that these homeplaces offer spaces to "grow and develop, to nurture [their] spirits" (42). Kitchen becomes, as hooks says, a space for "renewal, recovery, and redemption" (46).

Many of the characters created by the renowned Black writer Toni Morrison appear to be circumscribed by domesticity, within the kitchen walls and within a frame of subservient slavery. Yet majority of them transcend the boundaries and emerge transformed. Minrose C Gwin in her study on Morrison's novels observes how kitchen becomes a space where women gather the ability to "re-envision and expand" and to "displace and 'un-think' history" (57). She adds that "women's kitchens [are] transformative, radical and profoundly woman-centered" (55) and that, from the kitchen, "a space which has been physically, psychologically and culturally

confining for women…they have been able to emerge as more self-assured" (56). Gwin's observation establishes the idea that the closer and more possessive a woman is to and of the space of kitchen, the larger would be her degree of self-knowledge.

Two seminal works that study spaces come in crucial here. Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* and Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* analyse space as a construct. Beyond its physical manifestation, it takes different forms. Associations with this space can be healing, can be those of belongingness. It can be a place of escape; of rescue in distress. As Maria Claudia Andre remarks, domesticity is "no longer a synonym for house arrest, slavery or feminine submission, where women feel obliged to obey original traditional *kirche, kuche, kinder* (church, kitchen, children) masculine mandate but, to the contrary, it is a territory viable for the understanding and assertion of collective and individual identity" (6). She in fact, in her work *Chicanas and Latin American Women Writers Exploring the Kitchen as Self-Empowering Site* discusses how contemporary Latin American and Chicana writers reinterpret the realm of the domestic as an experimental site for the reconstruction of the feminine subject. She elaborates how in this newly defined locus, kitchen in particular is perceived as a self-empowering site where identities may be explored and transformed. She views it as a territory viable for the understanding and assertion of collective and individual identity.

The narratives under study have protagonists who reimage the kitchen such that it does not appear unpleasant, foul and frigid but luring and promising. It becomes a safe zone for the complete metamorphosis of their feminine individuality. Henri Lefebvre's concept of social space, as he explains in his work *The Production of Space* associates with a locus where past history interacts with the present

circumstance, which helps in defining the kitchen as a place of labour and identity construction. He identifies and explains social space as "the outcome of past actions" which "permits fresh actions to occur, while suggesting others and prohibiting yet others" (73). An impasse is detected in case of Desbiolles', McHenry's and Mehran's protagonist selves as they are thwarted by fears, anxieties, trauma and suppressed desires and emotions. Bahar, for example is unable to overcome the trauma of abuse she suffered back in Iran, that she fails in extending herself outwards. She is cooped up within the stereotype of the meek and helpless; fragile and feminine. So is Ginny who is unable to get beyond the trauma of her parents' death and the stigma of an 'abnormal' girl and is found to seek comfort by putting her hands inside her father's boots. Pauline Breedlove, one of Toni Morrison's characters cannot free herself from the harsh memories and trauma of slavery whereas another of her characters, Ondine extends beyond the stereotype and emerges strong. Kitchen becomes a social space influenced and subject to individual conceptualisations. It can sometimes be debilitating and at other times be transformative, proving what Lefebvre describes as the "complex, infinite and overlapping" (Chroninger 121) constructions of space. Lefebvre talks of the possibility of decoding and rereading an already produced space irrespective of its originary status. A space has to be interrogated on the basis of the social practices performed within it.

A cook gathers and performs agency in the act and process of preparing a meal. This "food agency" (Trubek et al 3), being "empowered to act" (8), is a journey from aspiration to action. She describes it as an ability to perform and produce what is envisioned and desired. And most often it is individual-centred rather than task-centered. Making a meal becomes a process that requires and expects engagements extending far beyond the physical binding walls of the kitchen. Trubek refuses to call

cooking a rote process but sees a blended matrix of action and cognition involved in it. She quotes Tim Ingold when she writes that "cooking is skilled practice that cannot be understood when it is considered solely as an additive assembly of constituent parts. Cooking is the emergent and contingent result of repeated activity, material objects, and acting subjects" (4). Ingold in his work explains that skilled practice is the "gestural synergy of human being, tool and raw material" (352) engaged in actions guided by "care, judgement, and dexterity" and mediated by "sensory corrections" (353).

In her essay that examines Laura Esquivel's novel *Like Water for Chocolate* Kathleen Batstone observes how feminine experience can even be translated into metaphysical experiences. She mentions how the writer reconstructs the kitchen as a site of transcendence and transformation beyond the customary space for meal preparation. The employment of magic realism itself becomes a strategy in the hands of the author and a tool to transfer the protagonist's emotions into the prepared meal and then into the consumer's corpus. Esquivel's narrative renders a supernatural quality to cooking and the kitchen space, thereby deconstructing the traditional outlook and perceptions of the kitchen as a restrictive, socially designated site. In this context, Batstone's essay disrupts the traditional systems of reductive binaries conceived and sustained by the Western cultures.

Cooking challenges the limits of a worldview based on binary oppositions creating an environment in which rigid definitions are replaced by more fluid and hybrid conceptions of the world. Like the character of Petra Aviles, an African slave in Rosario Ferre's novel *The House on the Lagoon* Tita in Esquivel's novel is the keeper of secrets and spirits, and her kingdom, the kitchen, is the intrinsic source of

her power. Her dishes smelt "of life and of death" (Esquivel 49). Tita "would invent new recipes, hoping to repair the connection that flowed" between her and Pedro "through the food she prepared. Her finest recipes date from this period of suffering" (64). "She was not meant for the loser's role" (37), and as she proclaims once to Mama Elena, tearing apart the sausages she had prepared, "Here's what I do with your orders! I'm sick of them! I'm sick of obeying you!" (89). To Rosaura's reminder to her to abide with the family tradition in the latter part of the novel she replies, "And I'm going to break with it several more times, if I have to…." (193).

Reconfiguring the kitchen space and reconceptualising cooking becomes a decolonising methodology that creates "a type of rupturing" (Abarca 5) that yields epistemologies which go beyond just knowing how to cook. When women appropriate the kitchen as their space, they enter into what a number of cultural critics call a thirdspace epistemology which offers them the opportunity to hear the stories of resistance and affirmation by urging them to think beyond binaries that keep them under the siege of reductions and limit their perception of knowledge. Citing from Emma Perez's work *Decolonising Methodologies* where she describes thirdspace feminism, Abarca writes, "The maneuvering of paradigms is in the hands of those actually doing the cooking" (6). These women mark their subjectivity which often times get "neglected and ignored" (Perez 127) by those outside the kitchen. For Perez, the decolonial imaginary is a critical apparatus for recovering the voices and experiences of Chicanas that indicates a transgressive space-time through which decolonising gestures operate. Perez envisions the decolonial imaginary as a "rupturing space" (6) that refuses the linear and progress-oriented conception of time imposed by colonialism. He writes:

> Decolonial imaginary is a resistant time-space that does not exist in a space of exteriority but rather reveals the fictive and mythological narratives upon which coloniality rests- i.e. universality, modernity, and progress. It does this from an in-between space, from within the very midst of oppressive systems and institutions. By recovering and bearing witness to what has remained "unspoken and unseen" by coloniality, Perez's methodology enables us to attend to the silenced and silent voices in order to articulate resistant histories, theories and decolonial subjectivities that hold the potential to dismantle apparatuses of coloniality. (xvi)

Gloria Anzaldua too argues for the need to break away from traditional models that seek to impose homogeneity by smothering and erasing heterogeneity. She advocates novel ways of writing and understanding women's lives. The third space which Perez talks about are recognised as possible spaces offering empowerment and awaiting acknowledgement in a postcolonial or decolonial structure. When a general feminist vision moves with an agenda that overlooks specificities and uniqueness, what goes unacknowledged are the domestic spaces centred around kitchens and the chores done there, particularly cooking. Anzaldua in her work *Borderland La Frontera* projects domestic space as a field of epistemology by itself which validates women's cooking. The performative gesture of cooking, like written inscriptions can also be read as texts as they are actions, practices, sounds and silences that are as well embodied as inscribed texts.

Cooking is a mode of articulation for the woman who cooks within her domestic kitchen. What gets expressed through cooking most often goes beyond the materiality of kitchen and the tangibility of food. As Anzaldua says, "It is by creating

a new mythos- that is, a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, the ways we behave" (80) that we can create a new consciousness- a culinary consciousness that aligns a lot with the "mestiza consciousness" (80) that she talks of, where dichotomies coexist and binaries like the mind and the body, the rational and the emotional interact. The notions of dualism that separate the mind and the body; the subjective and the objective which is deemed necessary by the Western epistemologies and philosophies in order to achieve knowledge, is problematic, "How can we knowers ever know anything which is that separate/different from us?" (Curtin and Heldke 206). Philosophers like Heldke, Deane W Curtin and Carlyn Korsmeyer speculate that had there been more attention and importance attached to cooking from the beginnings of philosophy, the distinction between mind and body could have been averted. From the beginnings of Western philosophy, the senses were always hierarchized. Sight and hearing, have been treated as distal senses directed outwards and away from the body as they process and perceive world experiences. This detachment, where perception happens without entering into a relationship with the outside entity, was qualified as objective in nature and hence elevated to the privileged positions of higher senses. This automatically relegated the other three senses of smell, taste and touch as subjective and therefore lower in status. These lower senses become more associated with the bodily as they perceive and process world experiences within the body. As Monica Torres points out, instead of an "epistemology of disconnection" (200) that furthers the chasm between the binaries and accentuates the divide, the mestizaje epistemology epitomises a convergence of binaries; blurring of borders. It envisions a divergent movement that builds a new perspective of inclusivity rather than exclusivity.

By its very nature, kitchen dismantles and disrupts binaries, and creates a space in which more than one perspective can coexist. Anzaldua's mestiza consciousness harps on the rhetoric of liberation and creativity. Similar to how the mestiza converts the pain inflicted on her by the oppressive mechanisms into an empowering spirit of survival, the women in the narratives occupy the relegated room of kitchen and convert it into their creative deck; their springboard towards empowerment. As Maria Claudia Andre opines, "Like a homeland without borders, the safe environment of a feminist kitchen provides a space where gender is no longer a given image defined by the masculine, but a means of exploration to a whole spectrum of sensual, sexual and textual possibilities" (17).

The hierarchisation of senses has influenced even the architectural domain. Deborah Fausch argues that "an architecture that required that it be experienced by senses other than vision in order to be understood" (42) would merit the designation of feminist architecture "if it fostered an awareness of and posited a value to the concrete, the sensual, the bodily- if it used the body as a necessary instrument in observing the content, the experience" (42). Women's way of appropriating the kitchen into their space of liberation represents a concrete, practical manner of making it into a feminist space by experiencing it with all the senses.

Female body is often incorporated into the domestic kitchen space so much so that it blurs the divisions of public/private spheres and defies the concept of a stable, fixed and rigid concept of place. As Linda McDowell points out in *Gender, Identity and Place*, the body "has a plasticity of malleability which means that it can take different forms and shapes at different times" (39). The fluidity underlying this notion allows a suppressed, repressed and displaced woman to regain her body by

determining how and what her kitchen ought to be, by applying her "sazon" (Abarca 11), her knowledge of the senses. The blatant stereotyping of kitchens overlooks this aspect of possibilities latent within it, masking the prospects of 'becoming'. The woman who cooks puts her entire being into the act, involving her body and mind. In *Like Water for Chocolate* Tita's bodily gestures and movements are seen to be sensuous and erotic, invoking Pedro's desires so much so that his intense gaze seeps into her and body experiences that transformation. Esquivel writes:

> The sound of the pans bumping against each other, the smell of the almonds browning in the griddle, the sound of Tita's melodious voice, singing as she cooked, had kindled his sexual feelings. Just as lovers know the time for intimacy is approaching from the closeness and scent of their beloved, or from the caresses exchanged in foreplay, so Pedro knew from those sounds and smells, especially the aroma of browning sesame seeds, that there was a real culinary pleasure to come…Tita on her knees, was bent over the grinding stone, moving in a slow regular rhythm…Pedro couldn't resist the smells from the kitchen and was heading towards them. [He was] transfixed by the sight of Tita in that erotic posture…Tita knew through her own flesh how fire transforms the elements, how a lump of cornflour is changed into a tortilla, how a soul that hasn't been warmed by the fire of love is lifeless, like a useless ball of cornflour. In a few moments' time, Pedro had transformed Tita's breasts from chaste to experienced flesh, without even touching them. (62-63)

Meredith Abarca's notion of sazon refers to the sensory logic of cooking which encompasses the personal and social within it; a discourse where memory, emotions and history are all evoked and shared. Abarca writes, "The sazon captures

the finesse, the nuances, the flair of something that involves a specific chemistry between the relationship of food, its preparation, and the person preparing it, a relationship that leads to philosophical everyday observations" (54). She also cites the context and long history of Mexican women's efforts to define the sazon. Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, a seventeenth century Mexican nun known nowadays in Mexico as the intellectual mother of Mexican women, places the kitchen and cooking as a discursive ""sitio y lengua" (space and language)" (54) for women's knowledge. She indicates that within the often-mundane practices of cooking, a woman's labour, lies a wealth of knowledge: cooking offers lessons in chemistry, physics, and philosophy.

She says:

> Well, and what then shall I tell you…of the secrets of nature that I have learned while cooking? I observe that an egg becomes solid and cooks in butter or oil, and on the contrary that it dissolves in sugar syrup. Or again, to ensure that sugar flows freely one need only add the slightest bit of water that has held quince or some other sour fruit. The yolk and white of the very same egg are of such a contrary nature that when eggs are used with sugar, each part separately may be used perfectly well, yet they cannot be mixed together. I shall not weary you with such inanities, which I relate simply to give you a full account of my nature, and I believe this will make you laugh. But in truth…what can we women know, save philosophies of the kitchen? It was well put by Lupercio Leonardo [sic] that one can philosophise quite well while preparing supper. I often say, when I make these little observations, "Had Aristotle cooked, he would have written a great deal more. (74)

Sor Juana uses kitchen and the practices of cooking as one of her many tactics to "unmask the semantics of repression" (35-36) toward women's knowledge. The knowledge that exists in the process of cooking all too often gets ignored as irrelevant.

The sazon is a corporeal, sensual knowledge. Its epistemology can be effectively comprehended only by making body the centre of knowledge. The sazon's sensory-logic, inseparable from food and thus inseparable from the body, values the ordinary- the activity of cooking and eating, as they lead to regain a sense of ourselves as cognitive bodily creatures, as food is the "most common and pervasive source of human experience" (Curtin and Heldke xiii) and is a source of knowledge that goes beyond an individual's likes and dislikes. Food has a supremely physical presence with which we can most effectively interact through our senses: the gustatory, the olfactory, the auditory, the visual and kinaesthetic. Sensual responses are a combination of the cognitive and the embodied and they place food and sazon at the centre of culinary discourse and knowledge.

The culture of the sazon relies on an interconnection of the senses; a coordinated functioning of all the senses, and cooking, as Abarca states, illustrates the inseparability of the senses and their collective cognitive function. The corporeal knowledge involved in the practice of everyday cooking offers a way of thinking about food, as philosopher Uma Narayan says, as that which "can help reveal the rich and messy textures of our attempts at self-understanding, as well as the interesting and problematic understanding of our relationship" (64) to and with others. These are relationships experienced within the body. In *Food, Body, and the Self*, Deborah Lupton theorises about the interaction among food, embodiment, and subjectivity. Lupton argues that this interaction combines cognitive discourses and "non or pre-

discursive sensual and embodied experiences [by which] individuals come to understand themselves, their bodies, and their relationships to the food they are eating" (13).

The sazon also contains within it an element of "al gusto" (Abarca 69) which is to be defined as how each woman creates "her own style according to how she accents a certain element of a [cooking] practice, [of] how she applies herself to one or another [method of cooking, of] how she creates her personal way of navigating through [already] accepted, allowed, and ready-made [cooking] techniques" (de Certeau and Giard 156). Al gusto is suggestive of this particular concept of subjectivity. It speaks of a fluid sense of self using terms of the sazon's sensory logic of subjectivity (Abarca 69). Subjectivity refers to:

> the manifold ways in which individuals understand themselves in relation to others and experience their lives. It is a less rigid term than identity, as it incorporates the understanding that the self, or more accurately, selves are highly chargeable and contextual, albeit within certain limits imposed by the culture in which an individual lives, including power relations, social institutions and hegemonic discourses. (Lupton 13)

To a woman's sazon may be added the component of invention too; the element of experimentation and novelty. In this newness can be detected a prospect of subversion as well. Hence, cooking allows space for practising and asserting agency. Doing cooking often becomes as much "a mental activity as it is a manual labour" (de Certeau and Giard 151). She defines the activity of doing-cooking, as one that requires "intelligence, imagination, and a twofold memorisation; one of gestures and the other of senses" (151). The sensory-logic of sazon is not restricted/constrained to a

fixed and unchanging methodological or conceptual paradigm. The protagonists of the narratives in focus place all five senses on a horizontal paradigm allowing a coordinated operation of the same to achieve a desired result at the end. The identification of the cook with the cooked becomes complete at the end of the process when the cook actually becomes the cooked. This total identification is achieved only through the coordinated involvement of all senses. As the character Dr John Brown in *Like Water for Chocolate,* interestingly narrates a theory:

> Each one of us is born with a box of matches inside us but we can't strike them all by ourselves…we need oxygen and a candle to help…the oxygen, for example, would come from the breath of the person you love; the candle could be any kind of food, music, caress, word or sound that engenders the explosion that lights one of the matches. For a moment we are dazzled by an intense emotion….If one doesn't find in time what will set off these explosions, the box of matches dampens, and not a single match will ever be lit. 'If that happens, the soul flees from the body and goes to wander among the deepest shades, trying in vain to find food to nourish itself, unaware that only the body it left behind, cold and defenceless, is capable of providing that food'. (Esquivel 104-105)

These lines clearly pronounce the flaw in disregarding the body and the bodily. As is indicated, a sense of completeness is achieved by a self only through an equal regard for the soul and the body; the mind and the corpus. The lines imply that the fruition of the self is accomplished through a fusion of the spiritual and the sensual.

A participatory, defining relationship with food is visible in all the narratives under study. The acts of agency, which transform the kitchen from a woman's place

into her space, take multiple forms as is evident from the chosen novels. In Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate,* for Tita the protagonist, an act of agency is the way she tenaciously sustains her sense of self by validating her emotions and claiming the right to her own sazon, culinary knowledge and talent based on the epistemology of her senses. In the novel, Tita's was an unusual birth:

> Tita in fact made her entrance into this world, prematurely, right there on the kitchen table amid the smells of simmering noodle soup thyme, bay leaves and coriander, steamed milk, garlic and of course onion….Thanks to her unusual birth Tita felt a deep love for the kitchen where she spent most of her life from the day she was born. (Esquivel 9-10)

Tita'a domain was the kitchen, where she grew vigorous and healthy on a diet of teas and thin corn gruels. She developed a sixth sense regarding everything concerning food. "Her eating habits, for example, were attuned to the kitchen routine…for Tita the joy of living was wrapped up in the delights of food…everything on the kitchen side of that door, on through the door leading to the patio and the kitchen and herb gardens was completely hers- it was Tita's realm (11).

The protagonist in Maryline Desbiolles's novel identifies so much with the mollusc that she cooks, that she is heard to say that they share a sense of shame; the sensation of fleeing, a sense of shapelessness and lot more, so much so that this participatory act of cooking becomes a therapeutic act of slow cooking of her own soul, with true cathartic effects. In Marsha Mehran's novel *Pomegranate Soup,* each of the Aminpour Sisters participates herself in the food she prepares. For them, kitchen and cooking are not seen as socially mandatory women's labour but as celebration and affirmation of their talent, knowledge, and affection. Each one is so

much part of the kitchen that they carry an element of it in them, as Layla who carries her signature scent of rose-water and cinnamon emitted by her body, spreading a strange sense of desire all around, or Bahar who sees herself in the Torshi vegetables which are pickled yet survive, or Marjan who personifies hope, life and growth when she nurtures the kitchen herb garden. Rather than an otherness, what defines these women in the novels is a oneness which they share with food; an openness towards food, which requires a relational understanding of self. Quotidian cooking and cuisine often captures the aesthetic essence of being in the moment- a concept that aligns a lot with the eastern Buddhist notion of "rol-pa"- "the timeless present, the flow, the ongoing moment of now" (Snow 150). Kimberley Snow, in her book *In Buddha's Kitchen* acknowledges how, for her, the state of being in the moment happens in the kitchen. She says, "The constant stream of intense taste sensations grounded me, providing a physical rather than mental reference for being. When I [am] working with food- slicing green peppers, mincing onions, paring zucchini- life [becomes] real. The colour, smell, feel, and taste of food provide a link to the physical world" (151). Cooking is viewed therefore as a contemplative engagement where the mind and the body work "together in union, engaged in thoughtful practice which ministers the whole person, an ordinary being, in an ordinary context….While food is experienced briefly, such experience is always in connection to our sense of self, to others, to places, to specific times in rather concrete ways" (Curtin and Heldke 10).

Philosophers Deane W. Curtin and Lisa M. Heldke, in their edited collection *Cooking, Eating, Thinking*, suggest that being in the moment, in the state of rol-pa, is experienced through the simplicity and ordinariness of everyday cooking when they write, "In the humble value of the kitchen we can find deep meaning about the value of life. It is not 'somewhere else', in some transcendental realm made secure by

absolute knowledge. We can find meaning in ordinary everydayness" (8, 20). This value that Curtin and others talk about and identify in cooking, is rooted in the culture and reality of the place and times and is embedded with history, thereby averting a disconnect that is often foregrounded in and favoured by the Western philosophy. Value of food is precisely that of the moment, which does not vouch for transcendence or abstraction but an engagement with ordinary reality that brims with history, culture, senses and emotions. Value of food is about its brute concreteness and authenticity which is grounded in the ordinary, everyday aspects of life and which anchors us to the present. The kitchen feeds the body, the mind and the soul.

Ellen Plante describes the kitchen as a focal point for the changes that occur in the world outside of it. What she tries to underscore is the transformative power of the space of kitchen. She talks of the several conversions and metamorphoses that happen in the kitchen. Conversions often become transformations- primarily the transformation of the self. This thought is further reinstated by Patrick Bryce Bjork in his work *The Novels of Toni Morrison: The Search for Self and Place* analyses Toni Morrison's characters who fail to reconceptualise kitchen and surge through cooking. These characters are unable to resurrect from the kitchen's ambiguities and irresolutions to claim it as their own space of authority. The "measure of affirmation" (163) that Bjork suggests as integral for "cultural regeneration" (163) has to be initiated and triggered by the self. Transformations begin at the personal level which is then reflected at the cultural and collective level (Chroninger 66).

Appropriating the space of kitchen and employing their sazon, their culinary consciousness, women can tactfully overcome the limitations imposed on them and the suppression they are subjected to. Arlene Voski Avakian's introduction to her

edited anthology *Through the Kitchen Window* illustrates this fluidity of meanings embedded in the space of kitchen. It foregrounds the abundance of possibilities linked with the kitchen conceived as both a woman's social place and a woman's own space. She writes, "The stories, poems, and essays I received evoked both tears and laughter. They spoke of oppression and resistance. They told of individual and cultural transformation" (Avakian 3). Cooking, she says, "is something that was and continues to be imposed on women, but it is also an activity that can be a creative part of our daily lives. As such the world of cooking is more complex than mere victimisation….Cooking becomes a vehicle for artistic expression, a source of sensual pleasure, an opportunity for resistance and even power" (6).

When a woman uses the kitchen to cast off societal moulds of demands and expectations, she crosses over into the realm where her actions inscribe the kitchen's function in her favour. With kitchen as a woman's space, she gives voice to her life story, affirms her right to be, and claims her right to become what she imagines and desires. She can either choose to remain vulnerable and susceptible to the dominant agencies or can subvert the same and assert her own agency by establishing an ownership over the kitchen as her own space of control and power. Any woman carving out a space for herself from her imposed social placing, actively engages in a process of personal and social "conscientizacion" (Abarca 150). The reconceptualization of kitchen and its function as a female social space provides the base for reconstructing its preimposed ideological functions. Redefining the kitchen space leads them on to redefine their own selves, seeking and accomplishing metamorphoses at multiple levels. Culinary writings and epistemology place women as agential subjects within their domestic kitchen spaces, expressing their agency through poignant practical and emotional articulations of cooking.

Culinary authority in the domestic realm is an act of empowerment studded with moments of agency, where the woman that cooks is bestowed with a voice and a strong sense of self. It is a woman's way of narrating her life; her own genuine voice that articulates herself as she explains or develops a recipe and enacts it by way of preparing a dish. These kitchen articulations restore them to a sense of themselves and help them reaffirm their self-worth. It is their way of performing themselves and curating their selves so that they do not succumb to the many mechanisms of erasures. Through food's sensual and emotive aspects, she seizes her subjectivity. Abarca's concept of the borderless boundary zone helps read the kitchen and kitchen articulations as part of a thirdspace epistemology that foregrounds the notion of possibilities revealing the layers and degrees of agency and subjectivity.

What gets proven here is the fluidity of kitchen space as is corroborated by Debra Castillo when she writes that the most perfect analogy for the production of distinct social spaces is the composition of a recipe which is "not a blueprint [and] less a formula than a general model; less an axiom of unchanging law and more a theory of possibilities" (xiii). Protagonists of the select narratives here enact their agency in their own patterns in the kitchen to ultimately reconstitute their own 'othered' selves and assert the emergent, empowered selves. They reject the notion of a stultifying kitchen that entraps, and embrace the kitchen of possibilities and hope. They expend and negotiate the borderless boundary zone of their kitchens to work within and against the grains of dominant social powers. Just as there are possibilities of multiple combinations of ingredients read in a recipe, there are also multiple manifestations of spaces created within the kitchen.

The kitchen counter becomes the cook's palette- dotted with ingredients, varied and distinct in shapes and shades, with the cauldron and the ladle in shape and steady, ready to receive the artist's imprints. Kitchen space emerges to be a cook's studio where she plays out her spontaneous strokes, creating masterpieces that appeal many palates.

Chapter 3

Culinary Mnemonics

"Identity is not composed of a fixed set of memories but lies in the dialectical, ceaseless activity of remembering and forgetting, assimilating and discarding" (Lambek & Antze xxix).

Food, with its wave of aromas, flavours and textures take us on a mnemonic ride atop a variegated corpus of memories, some of which are sweet, some bitter, some sour and more. Food propels often a reliving and at other times an unliving in the present, of moments in the past, driving us on into the future. Beneath its cloak of the quotidian, food enfolds history- both personal and social; individual and collective. At the individual level, one's memories of food can become powerful indicators and taste preferences that make up one's identity, while at a collective level, food memories can define the shared values of a family, or a community as a whole, thereby evolving into a food narrative shared across different people threading time and space. Forrest writes:

> Food is the nexus of the sensing self and the sensible society, the meeting point of the individual and the communal. Through the experience of tasting, smelling, touching, seeing, and even hearing food, the individual encounters food and becomes a part of the society. Paying attention to food from the perspective of the senses allows us to place individual experience within cultural and social context, and to examine how social and cultural context shapes individual sensory experience. (353)

Though the epicurean dimensions of food and its pleasures which potentially transport us into nostalgic euphoria is much discussed at the consumption level, the pleasures and the mnemonic dimensions of cooking it, get little attention. In his seminal essay on cultural anthropology, “The Culinary Triangle”, Claude Levi-Strauss has remarked about the cultural character of cooking food. He identifies it as an exclusive human behaviour, almost on par with language, when he writes, “Cooking, it has never been sufficiently emphasised, is with language a truly universal form of human activity: if there is no society without a language, nor is there any which does not cook in some manner at least some of its food” (Levi-Strauss 40).

Food undoubtedly offers pleasure when consumed, but often of the ephemeral kind- one that wanes and perishes once ingested. This ephemerality of food is viewed as its disqualifier in the field of mnemonics because memories are considered to be created on and around tangible entities of permanence. The popularity of the Proustian trope in literature vouches for the capacity of food to evoke our senses and spark off a series of powerful memories. The senses contrive and generate pleasure when one consumes food. The same senses conjure up the past in the same act. “The tongue remembers the sensations of the ingested, the nose reminisces the aromas and scents, while the heart and mind register the experience in memory. Perhaps one of the most mysterious phenomena of food is not what food does in consumption, but how it lingers *in memory*” (Lee 1).

The “exquisite pleasure” (Proust 42) that Marcel Proust experienced in a bite of his tea-dipped madeleine is said to have invaded his senses, “with no suggestion of its origin” (42). The uncanniness that he expresses about his experience can be rightly associated with the sensoriality of it which sometimes outlaws spatial and temporal

dimensions. The Proustian experience, however, has already pervaded and has been celebrated in academic discourses and articulations. What still remains underrated, rather undermined and unrecognised, is the sensorial experiences associated with the phase of food that precedes its ingestion- the phase of preparation or cooking.

Academia's neglect towards cooking and its disregard towards considering it a subject worth serious examination and thought, is owing to its monotony and mundaneness, and the performers stereotypically associated with it- women. Historian Michael Symons says that "repetitiveness of cooking is part of the reason why many western intellectuals have snubbed it" (26) and Krishnendu Ray notes that cooking and its "triviality is linked basically to the inferiority of the subject- it is mostly women and mostly poor people who do most of the cooking in most parts of the world" (Sutton *Bigger* 3). Vicki Swinbank argues that it is the very everydayness of women's domestic cooking that causes it to be overlooked and not counted as culture.

The largely non-individualistic, collective tradition of women's cooking is generally dismissed by male intellectuals who consider that only the "exceptional and the extraordinary" constitute culture (Swinbank 478). This chapter attempts to turn around this cliché and identify the astounding and memorable component in everyday domestic cooking. Luce Giard in her essay "Doing-Cooking" writes:

> Culinary practices situate themselves at the most rudimentary level, at the most necessary and the most unrespected level, and people judge this work to be repetitive and monotonous, devoid of intelligence and imagination; people exclude it from the field of knowledge, yet it requires a multiple memory: a memory of apprenticeship, of witnessed gestures, and of consistencies. (de Certeau and Giard 156)

Giard observes that in cooking:

> Sensory perception intervenes as well: more so than the theoretical cooking time indicated in the recipe… The creative ingenuity of cleverness also finds its place in culinary production: Each meal demands the invention of an alternative mini- strategy when one ingredient or the appropriate utensil is lacking. Entering into the vocation of cooking and manipulating ordinary things make one use intelligence, a subtle intelligence full of nuances and strokes of genius, a light and lively intelligence that can be perceived without exhibiting itself, in short, in very ordinary intelligence. (156-158)

In her essay "Foodmaking as a Thoughtful Practice", Lisa Heldke puts forward a framework to read cooking as a significant activity, in contrast to the Western epistemological tendencies to reduce it merely to the level of "doing" (Curtin and Heldke 203), lacking in any serious degree of thinking or need of intellect, science, logic or rationality. This reductive stratagem of Western philosophy aggravates the divide between headwork and handwork, as they denigrate the practical labour as it already exists in the social fabric, always put upon slaves and serfs on account of its unpleasantness. John Dewey writes that philosophers have only "perpetuated the derogation by formulating and justifying it, they did not originate it" (*The Quest* 4-5). This, he opines, aggravates and accentuates the binary divide between mind and body; intellect and emotion.

When Plato envisioned his ideal state in *Republic,* he expected the guardians of it to be disconnected "from the activities that keep body and soul together" (Curtin and Heldke 211). He conceived of the bodily, as the lowly and the lesser, compared to the rational (of the mind). Reason (which he did not recognise as a necessary

component in cooking) was the soul driving factor of this Republic. The transitory, temporal nature of food and the knowledge and skill around it, forced it to succumb to the Western epistemia's bias towards the abstract, essential and unchanging knowledge of the non-material things. As Heldke observes, "Genuine knowledge" (Curtin and Heldke 204) eclipsed the bunch of banal, practical activities. This hierarchisation of the mind over the body, led to an overt separation of the subject and the object, promoting disembodiment and non-invasive vision (206). There is an obvious regard given to what is seen (even from a distance) over what is felt, smelt, tasted or touched. "Knowing" (203), therefore, disregards "doing" (203) which engages with all the bodily senses.

Cooking involves an embodied knowledge of food which calls for an intimate interconnection between the cook and the cooked, the subject and the object, the self and the dish prepared. The latter evolves out of the bodily engagement of the cook with the ingredients. Unlike other forms of enquiry, cooking is where the "subject and the object meet and touch" (206) and interact. Boundaries blur, allowing one to become the other. The food narratives under study, clearly articulate this breach of boundaries between the subject and the object. The protagonists engage in "performing embodied acts of knowing" (Smith 168) which is described as "bodily mode" (168). Esquivel describes Tita cooking:

> The steam rising from the pan mingled with the heat given off by Tita's body. The anger she felt within her acted like yeast on bread dough. She felt its rapid rising, flowing into every last recess of her body; like yeast in a small bowl, it spilled over to the outside, escaping in the form of steam through her eyes, nose and all her pores. (137)

Heldke uses the phrase “thoughtful practice” (Curtin and Heldke 214) to refer to this act, ascribing it to John Dewey. She reconceptualises the theory/practice binary and offers a blueprint to interpret cooking as an act of possibilities, holding its own respect and pertinence. In *The Kitchen Daughter: A Novel,* Ginny resists being “labelled” (McHenry 157) by anyone, least of all, her sister. She defies the monolithic definition of ‘normal’ and views it from a pluralistic perspective which accommodates many definitions of ‘normal’. She loves the book *An Anthropologist on Mars* for the simple reason that it reassures her of what she enters in her Normal Book- that there is no normal. She writes, “People are people, and that means a broad spectrum. Loose wires, crossed signals. The brain can take hairpin turns, at birth or after. I’m not the most unusual, by far” (89).

Cooking is all about combinations, and hence possibilities. It is not just one dish that can be created with the same ingredients, but many. Ginny is heard to say, “In cooking, everything is about combination. Bringing flavours together” (98), which reinstates her notion of normal again. Heldke identifies an in-betweenness in the nature of cooking, and she prefers to call it “a thoughtful activity” (Curtin and Heldke 216) - a mentally manual activity. She borrows Dewey’s words to describe it as “intelligent”, “inherently and immediately enjoyable” (*Experience* 358), “wary, observant, sensitive to slight hints and intimations” (314-315). The enabling elements of it include an intimate relation between self and other, influence of the community, bodily factors, emotions and the erotic. The things that get acknowledged here are the concrete, the material, the corporeal, the emotional, the erotic and the embodied. In cooking, the interconnectedness between the self and the other, replaces the dichotomous divide between the two, thereby qualifying it as a thoughtful practice. To quote Heldke:

> By seeing ourselves as connected to the things we grow and cook- by transforming the subject/object dichotomy into a relationship which recognises the interconnections between us and those foods- we are called upon to recognise a mode of interaction that might be called "bodily knowledge". A conception of thoughtful practices should have as one of its foci a realisation of the embodied nature of those activities. (Curtin and Heldke 218)

She continues to say that the knowledge involved in cooking is not contained" (218) in one's head but in one's "hands, wrists, eyes and nose as well" (218). Bodily knowledge then, is literally what is known as using the body. Merry White in her study of Japanese cooking techniques observes, "I saw that cooks, through experience and constant trials, learned in the tongue, the nose, the fingers, and the eyes- and even in the sounds- what was desirable in food" (69). She identifies the cooks' "bodies and the biomechanics of labour" (70) to be the most crucial components in food making, followed by the skills, the artefacts and the contexts. The body becomes the most agential of the cook's tools. The literally visceral nature of food corresponds to the corporeality of the cook's body. "Working her entire torso, she mixed the herbs with the cooked rice, fresh lime juice, salt and pepper. She stirred with all her might despite the unrelenting ache in her shoulders, for such strong rotations were necessary to the *dolmehs'* harmony" (Mehran 12).

Verta Mae Smart-Grosvenor also refers to this embodied cooking in her essay "Vibration Cooking: or The Travel Notes of a Geechee Girl". She uses the term "vibration" (xvii) when she talks of how she is guided by the "look and smell" (xvii) of a dish when it is done. This "demystification" (xxxvii) dismantles the Cartesian approach that treats the body as secondary and in servitude to the mind and the

intellect, and which therefore is “inauthentic and pretentious” (Curtin and Heldke 219) according to her. The “vibrations” (Smart-Grosvenor xxix) help her better understand and connect with food. For Grosvenor, recipes used in cooking are more like a “maxim or a memory-jogger, or an inspiration. It cannot be a complete account” (Curtin and Heldke 219).

Bodily knowledge which completes and complements a recipe is often something that is acquired through embodied practices and experience, as is implied. An account of instructions simply prove futile if the body fails to be attuned to the object, through a set of practiced interactions with it. Merry White too agrees upon this when she talks of how the Western concept of recipe is a “didactic, and precision-qualified” (67) entity with little connect or codification of the nature of the experience, observation, knowledge and skills required in cooking. Hence, what gets often overlooked as the redundancy in cooking, becomes its most defining aspect. Techniques “are to be practiced, repeated to become “second nature” in the body work of cooking” (67). It is best learnt through observation, imitation, repetition and sometimes trial and error. What is merely appetitive and unfortunate for Plato is the fortunate component for Grosvenor. This is evidenced by Tita’s birth in *Like Water for Chocolate*:

> Thanks to her unusual birth, Tita felt a deep love for the kitchen, where she spent most of her life from the day she was born…Tita’s domain was the kitchen, where she grew vigorous and healthy on a diet of tears and thin corn gruels. This explains the sixth sense Tita developed about everything concerning food. Her eating habits, for example, were attuned to the kitchen routine: in the morning, when she could smell that the beans were

> ready; at midday, when she sensed the water was ready for plucking the chickens; and in the afternoon, when the bread was baking. (Esquivel 10-11)

When the subject/object dichotomy is disregarded, what it entails is a community connection. It opens up a multidimensional order of relations connecting the cook, the cooked and the consumer. A recipe could be a cultural text embedded within a community. It is "a prototypical cultural representation" (Sutton *Cooking Skills* 304) as Dan Sperber calls it. The performance of cooking is achieved only when the textual instructions in a recipe gets translated into "bodily behaviour" (304). It acquires meaning only when performed by the hands of a cook; only when it is suffused with the bodily factor that opens up a plethora of tastes/possibilities, offering room for experiment, and to not follow it verbatim, unlike in Audre Lorde's mother's kitchen where "there was only one right way to do anything" (*Zami* 80), or Tita's De la Garza ranch kitchen which demands a strict adherence to the matriarch Mama Elena's recipes, or Ginny's kitchen where she fusses over the hand-written recipes of her family members, particularly and meticulously followed word by word. The binding presence of recipes make kitchens the conflicted spaces in all the novels considered for study.

Recipes become cultural entanglements for the protagonist selves. They seek liberation from the restricting framework of recipes and attempt change and transformation. In *Like Water for Chocolate* everything had been prepared the traditional way, using the De la Garza family recipes. De la Garza ranch belonged to the matriarch Mama Elena. After the death of Mama Elena's husband five days from the birth of Tita, her youngest daughter, the absence of a male presence in

the family caused her iron dictates to control the ranch- and this often included her daughters, ranch aids and even the mute farm animals. Even the threat of the Mexican Revolution and the attack by the rebels never deterred her. She is heard to respond to Father Ignacio's warning, "I've never needed a man for anything; I've done all right with my ranch and my daughters all by myself. Men aren't that important in this life, Father…nor is the revolution as dangerous as you make out! It's worse to have chillies with no water around!" (Esquivel 74). Traditions to be observed and maintained were designed and decided by her. The ranch kitchen fire was never lit sans her sanction. Mama Elena decided the rules, routines and recipes in the kitchen, and "discussion was not one of the forms of communication permitted in Mama Elena's household" (14). Her intolerance towards disrespect filled Tita with so much fear that after Mama Elena's death, this matriphobia continues to torment her:

> Tita no longer had a mother but she couldn't get rid of the feeling that any minute some awful punishment was going to descend on her from the great beyond, courtesy of Mama Elena. That was a familiar feeling, it was like the fear she felt when she was cooking and didn't follow a recipe to the letter. She was always sure when she did it that Mama Elena would find out and, instead of congratulating her on her creativity, gave her a terrible tongue-lashing for disobeying the rules. But she couldn't resist the temptation to violate the oh-so-rigid rules her mother imposed in the kitchen…and in life. (178-179)

What Mama Elena tried to control through her insistence on traditional recipes, was in fact Tita's own life. Tita was bound to merely perform the roles

dictated to her, so much so that once away from the ranch at Dr John Brown's house:

> She would stare at her hands for hours on end. She would regard them like a baby marvelling that they belonged to her. She could move them however she pleased, yet she didn't know what to do with them….Now, seeing her hands no longer at her mother's command, she didn't know what to ask them to do, she had never decided for herself before. They could do anything or become anything. (99)

Any discussion on skill, skilled/embodied processes/practices would also connect itself naturally to memory. The "education of the senses" (Sutton *Cooking Skills* 300) is in a way a honing of one's memory. Getting one's skills nurtured through repetition and apprenticeship automatically becomes a mnemonic exercise. Discourses on the mnemonics of food has always been unique in comparison to memories constructed around other cultural entities. The primary reason for it is that no sensory experience of any dish can be consistently identical. No food would ever taste the same twice, not even when cooked by the same person. Even a fruit for that matter, in its rawest and most natural form, can never quite taste the same more than once, not even when plucked from the same tree at the same time. It is almost impossible to immortalise or transmit the exactness of the flavour and taste of food unlike other cultural artefacts.

Memories of food therefore are always fluidic. They are never static; rigid; fixed. This fluidity is reflected in the act of food making too. Connerton harps on the notion of "skill as fluid performance" (300) when he talks of cooking- a performance "evidenced in skills which take time to acquire and cannot be simply reproduced or

copied" (300). It permeates into and flows through the subjective realms of senses. It is the result of consistent interactions with the embodied experience of the "semiosphere" (Parasecoli 648). Semiosis is a process, as Parasecoli interprets, which involves both the body and the mind. It is more or less a holistic approach which moves further beyond the sensory perceptions and least influenced by the mind/body divide. The distinctiveness of a dish therefore is not to be merely ascribed to the flavour gradients of its ingredients but to a variety of embodied information that defines it. These would be a conglomerate whole of "material and cultural realities, including objects, practices and norms" (661) which breach the discursive/non-discursive barricades.

Being the procurer and preparer of food, the cook becomes the first consumer of it, when he/she gathers, recognises and interprets the ingredients through semiosis. Sutton implies the same when he says, "the products of cooking partake in some sense of both production and consumption, and nearly simultaneously…consumption itself (through tasting) is part of the process of skilled food production" (*Cooking Skills* 300). As Parasecoli points out, food "is a semiosphere constituted by the communicative interactions among different "Umwelten"" (649), a term that Jakob von Uexkull describes thus:

> Around us is a protective wall of senses that gets denser and denser….This island of senses that wraps everyman like a garment, we call his *Umwelt.* It separates into distinct sensory spheres that become manifest one after the other at the approach of an object…. Objects, equipped with all the possible sensory characteristics always remain products of human subject, they are not things that have any existence independent of a subject. They become "things"

> infront of us only when they have become covered by all the sensory envelopes that the island of senses can give them. What they were before that, before they become covered is something that we will never find out. (107)

The cook interprets the ingredients using the aid of his/her semiotic environments. As Kalevi Kull says, "Umwelt is a term uniting all the semiotic processes of an organism into a whole" (304). It is "a subjectively determined objective world" (Deely 20). Food therefore, is simultaneously an individual and a cultural phenomenon. Food-related memories are the result of "ongoing dynamic interactions between the different activities in the brain and the stimuli derived from the senses" (Parasecoli 650). This, though it answers much about the Proustian conundrum of ingestion which conjures up involuntary memories, fails to reveal much about specific acts of cooking where "memory erupts" (Meah and Jackson 3) within the domestic spaces of kitchens. Angela Meah and Peter Jackson take wide strides to save such subjective memories made within the precincts of private kitchens from the allegations of being "erroneous" (3) and "nostalgic" (3), by foregrounding the kitchen as a repository for, and representation of "memory and nostalgia for the past, everyday life in the present, and future dreams and fears" (Blunt and Varley 3). Kitchen becomes a site "in which memory, mood and agency are materialised" (Meah and Jackson 4), a space in which "objects of personal, artistic or cultural interest are stored and displayed to narrate the untold stories of lives being lived, those having been lived and those which are imagined within them" (4).

Kitchen becomes an intensely personal space wherein relations with food and other objects play a vital role "in mobilising the sensory, haptic and kinetic dimensions of memory through a combination of taste-, sound- and smell-scapes and

mundane activities which are embedded in the rhythms of everyday life", and constitute "the sensory dimensions of memory" (4). David Sutton opines that "it is the sensuality of food, how it crosses over- via processes of synaesthesia with different sensory registers that makes it a particularly compelling medium for memory" (*Cooking Skills* 301). This synesthetic exercise in fact, shapes a "non-hierarchised sensory perception" (301) that contributes to a holistic and complete culinary consciousness. This is clearly evidenced by Tita's reminiscing of the days she spent in the past with Nacha in the kitchen:

> Those happy days when Nacha was with her seemed so distant now. Nacha! The smells: her noodle soup, her chilaquiles, her champurrado, her molcajete sauce, her bread with cream, all were far away in a distant past. They could never be surpassed, her seasoning, her atole drinks, her teas, her laugh, her herbal remedies, the way she braided her hair and tucked Tita in at night, took care of her when she was sick, and cooked what she craved and whipped the chocolate. If she could bring back a single moment from that time, a little of the happiness from those days, she could prepare the Kings' Day Bread with the same enthusiasm she had felt then! (Esquivel 153)

Though she was more of a consumer those days, fattened by Nacha's cooking, the synesthetic experience pervaded her entire being, training her to become a future cook like Nacha and qualified to take up her role in the ranch kitchen "… with Nacha dead, Tita was the best qualified of all women in the house to fill the vacant post in the kitchen, and in there flavours, smells, textures and the effects they could have were far beyond Mama Elena's iron command" (45). As Jose

Luis Loredo comments about traditional Mexican cooking apprenticeship, "In our country culinary technique is still studied through a hands-on apprenticeship rather than a systematic and intellectual teaching. The most common form of learning is to attach oneself to people with more experience and to try to capture their 'secrets' instead of receiving knowledge from a more formal source" (Bower 224). Her apprenticeship under Nacha, all through her early formative years, does Tita good, and endows her with the skill and power of cooking, with which she accomplishes her liberation and achieves a sense of self.

Sutton even perches on the prospects of looking at memory itself as a sense, wherein he does not look at it as a separate capacity attributable to or associated with any particular bodily organ, but rather, an aspect or element of a sensory experience. He identifies "a semantic circuit that links the sensorial to agency, memory, finitude, and therefore history" (Seremetakis 4) - all of which are contained within the etymological spectrum of the senses. The senses not only represent the inner states which shy away from a very visible display of themselves on the surface. They are equally well situated within a social-material arena outside of the body, facilitating a synaesthetic experience. The senses are semantic apparatuses that function beyond consciousness and intention:

> The interpretation of and through the senses becomes a recovery of truth as collective, material experience. The senses are also implicated in historical interpretation as witnesses or record-keepers of material experience…The involuntary circuit of the senses reveals that embodied performance is in part constructed out of the cross-communication of senses and

> things…Memory as a distinct meta-sense transports, bridges and crosses all the other senses. (6-9)

This synaesthetic experience of cooking is detailed in Desbiolles' novel, where the protagonist is heard to say:

> I think of stronger odors but at the same time the smell of my steaming dish covers everything, penetrates the clothing, hair, inundates the house to such an extent that I seem to detect in my dish the scent of the green tomato preserves and the first fire in the yard at summer's end. It has often seemed to me, it's true, that a sensation, provided it is felt strongly enough, contains many other, if not all, sensations, as though they were interwoven, flowed from one into the other and were held together tightly like cut-out dolls that appear once you unfold the paper. (92)

Sutton's concept of "gustemology" (*Bigger* 43) places food under focus and offers a means to study the world and its ways, people, and relationships through the sensory experience of food. Though he lays down multiple perspectives for operationalising gustemology as a food inquiry toolkit, he particularly advocates for memory as a central focal point when studying people's sensorial and philosophical relations with food. Sutton understands senses to be forms of interaction and defines sensing as "a type of communicative and creative channel between self and world" (Korsmeyer and Sutton 471). For Sutton, neither are senses "passive receptors of data" (471) nor are sensations "objective" (463). He says that "sensory experience is not simply passively registered but actively created between people" (Sutton *Food and the Senses* 218).

In *Like Water for Chocolate,* Tita's short stint at Dr John Brown's house is one of silence, where she refuses to speak because she does not want to (Esquivel 106), until the wafts of oxtail soup that Chencha brings to the house reach her, helping her "return to her senses" (113). One is reminded of what Deborah Lupton writes when she quotes a writer from a food magazine, to say that "the food memories that haunt me most are carried on the drifting curls of steam from a soup bowl…the soup I remember most vividly is a simple chicken broth strewn with giblets and egg noodles, that tasted of love, smelled of friendship and settled a gnawing, uneasy, restless feeling, somewhere deep inside me" (32). Away from the ranch, traumatised by Mama Elena's spanking, Tita cannot:

> remember how to cook so much as a couple of eggs, enjoy any kind of food, if only she could …return to life. She noticed a smell that struck her…Oxtail soup!...With the first sip, Nacha appeared there at Tita's side, stroking her hair as she ate, as she had done when she was little and sick, kissing her forehead over and over. There were all the times with Nacha, the childhood games in the kitchen, the trips to the market…How good it was to have a long talk with Nacha. Just like old times, when Nacha was still alive and they had made oxtail soup together. Chencha and Tita laughed reliving those moments, and they cried remembering the steps of the recipe. At last Tita had been able to remember a recipe, once she had remembered the first step, chopping the onion. (114)

Memory, for Sutton is that creative channel between present and past that enables the past to suffuse the present and inflect the future. Sutton uses the term "polytemporality" (Korsmeyer and Sutton 472) to convey how "the present moment

seems to hum with memories of past words and past times" (472). In *The Kitchen Daughter: A Novel,* the only way for Ginny to escape from the trauma caused by the loss of her parents, is to lose herself in food. It is rarely an indulgence in eating, but always through cooking and the thoughts of food- imagining the feel, the texture, the consistency, the colour and the aroma of familiar foods or ingredients- that help her sail through. Sometimes the rich, wet texture of melting chocolate, sometimes the bulk of bread-dough, sometimes the silky feel of pasta dough, scent of onion changes- she experiences the magical transformations of food in her imagination. Kitchen becomes her space of security and the warmth of the stove gives her the maturing warmth of a mother's love. Kitchen allows her to breathe freely and experience the safety of her home. She dives into a recipe and usually lets it absorb her. "She lets the instruction take her over, step by step by step until the hum begins to fade to silence" (McHenry 6). The most relaxing sound for Ginny is the rhythm of the knife snicking quietly against the cutting board.

For Sutton, polytemporality refers to how people use their memories to call upon the past to interpret, contextualise, or simply link the present with the comfort of the known past. (Korsmeyer and Sutton 473). In *Pomegranate Soup,* the shelf laden with "preserved artefacts: etched copper and brass trays, a framed woven calligraphy that read 'Tea' in Farsi, five old-style samovars (one belonging to the girls' grandmother, which Bahar had bundled up in her coat that day they left Iran for good), and a large print of a painting showing a traditional Iranian tea house (men only), complete with indoor fountain and hookah pipes" (Mehran 31), the Persian rugs, the "treasure-trove of spices" (27)- all efforts are taken by the Aminpour Sisters to transform Papa's Pastries into their "Eastern-flavoured oasis" (23). When their first customer Father Mahoney comes to dine at their restaurant, Marjan serves him

abgusht, an Iranian delicacy. “Instructing the priest on the fine points of eating it, had somehow stirred Marjan’s memories of home” (121-122). Marjan thinks that:

> If she was in Iran now this tea would be accompanied by either angelica-powdered pomegranate seeds, crackling pumpkin nuts or sticky saffron and carrot halva. On the night of the winter solstice everyone in her family would gather on the living-room rug to share such treats and tell stories. If it was particularly cold, they would smuggle around the *korsi,* a low table covered in a quilt, and wrapped a second time in a pretty embroidered cloth. Underneath the table would be a small electrical heater that warmed their hearts and laps as they sat, recounting memories and their hopes for the year ahead. (122)

Holtzman too talks of the power of food in maintaining the spatial and temporal connections that facilitate both reflective memory of past events and experiences, as well as prospective memory of anticipated future rituals and celebrations. Incorporating memory as a sense opens up new vistas for understanding people's “gustemic lives” (Lee 5). Everyday domestic food preparation practices facilitate “gustemic knowing” (5) as explored and evidenced by Heldke. Through the memories of their social pasts and the combined provocation of their senses during cooking, they show that the human bodies are laden with a rich corpus of accumulated memories, becoming a medium channelling/ conducting energies from past to present.

Though the relationship between memory and the senses are most obviously and commonly implicated in taste and smell, as Sutton suggests, memory is also “embodied, haptic and kinetic” (Meah and Jackson 5), as it comes along with the senses and skilled practices. What is referred to as habit memories, is described by Sutton as “a remembrance of the hands” (*Bigger* 89). They imply that culinary

memory resides in the hands, more than heads, which stresses on the "embodied character of memory" (Meah and Jackson 5). As pointed out by Bhatti et al, "If our memories are a form of knowledge about ourselves…they are sourced by the past through our bodies in the form of interactions between haptic perception, the senses, tactile experiences, and movements" (71-72). Similar to museums which become sites storing, displaying and curating objects of public or national significance, for individuals, embodied, habit memories which are accomplished through repetition and often stored unconsciously, get embedded in more ordinary, personal spaces, narrating their lives and experiences. Objects and spaces can have their own agency and kitchen can become a repository for, and carrier of memory- physical, symbolic and embodied. In *The Kitchen Daughter: A Novel,* when Angelica, her sister Amanda's friend arrives with a prospective buyer for their house to show him around, Ginny feels miserable at the thought of losing her abode, her comfort zone with the smells of her parents and her memories embedded within it. She feels miserable and struggles to keep herself composed by raking up the memory of a meal that she had with her family once in a Korean restaurant:

> So I force my eyes closed, and remember a Korean restaurant Dad took me to for my fifteenth birthday…We cooked wet, slippery beef over grills set into our table but most of all I loved the panchan. Countless tiny dishes of exotic things, which Dad explained to me one by one. Kimchee, sour, hot. Spicy radish, a yellow so bright it glowed. Green beans dotted with wheels of jalapeno. A clear, trembling walnut jelly. I remember each panchan, savor its imagined taste again. (McHenry 71)

Food memories comfort her, calm her down and help her regain herself and her composure. Angelica's visit was devastating for Ginny. Yet after she leaves, she goes up into her parents' closet, shuts the door, and sits down in the dark. She says:

> I need the comfort. I look for a food memory to calm me and I settle on ceviche. A tart bite, a clean, fresh wave of flavour. Think of the process. Raw fish is translucent, but when you drip the lime juice onto it, it becomes something else cubes of white-fleshed fish begin to flake. Shrimp turn pink. Texture becomes color. Visible streaks, almost stripes, show the grain. (75)

Cooking is often a "corporeal practice" (Bigot 12). It involves an active and intimate engagement of the body with the ingredients and utensils, and a complete identification with the processes involved, primarily through the body. The kneading, peeling, pounding, stirring, sautéing and more, call for gestural energy and incorporation into the dish:

> The sound of the pans bumping against each other, the smell of the almonds browning in the griddle, the sound of Tita's melodious voice, singing as she cooked, had kindled his sexual feelings. Just as lovers know the time for intimacy is approaching from the closeness and scent of their beloved, or from the caresses exchanged in foreplay, so Pedro knew from those sounds and smells, especially the aroma of browning sesame seeds, that there was a real culinary pleasure to come….Tita, on her knees, was bent over the grinding stone, moving in a slow regular rhythm….Pedro couldn't resist the smells from the kitchen and was heading towards them. But he stopped stock-still in the doorway, transfixed by the sight of Tita in that erotic posture. Tita looked up without stopping her grinding and her

> eyes met Pedro's. At once their passionate glances fused so perfectly that whoever saw them would have seen but a single look, a single rhythmic and sensual motion, a single trembling breath, a single desire….Tita knew through her own flesh how fire transforms the elements, how a lump of cornflour is changed into a tortilla, how a soul that hasn't been warmed by the fire of love is lifeless, like a useless ball of cornflour. In a few moments' time, Pedro had transformed Tita's breasts from chaste to experienced flesh, without even touching them. (Esquivel 62-63)

Audre Lorde identifies erotic as a powerful resource that lies in a "deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognised feeling" (*Uses* 1). What otherwise is invested with the energy and potential for change, is consciously suppressed, distorted and corrupted in oppressive systems and cultures. This power, according to Lorde, arises from the "deepest and non-rational knowledge" and it offers "a well of replenishing and provocative force" (1) to women. The erotic is "a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings. It is an internal sense of satisfaction to which, once we have experienced it, we know we can aspire…the erotic is not a question only of what we do; it is a question of how acutely and fully we can feel in the doing" (2). Lorde also exposes the horror within any system that inappropriately defines human need by excluding the psychic and emotional components, thereby robbing it of its erotic value, power, and appeal.

The Greek word *eros* personifies love, creative power and harmony. It is as Lorde says, "an assertion of the life-force of women, of that creative energy" (3).

Erotic knowledge is an empowering one- a medium through which one scrutinises all aspects of one's existence, and evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning within one's life. Projected then from within each one of us, it becomes a serious onus not to settle for the convenient, the shoddy, the conventional, the expected, or the safe and comfortable. We are raised to fear the deepest of our cravings within ourselves. And this fear of our desires keeps them suspect and indiscriminately powerful, for to suspect any truth is to give it strength beyond endurance. The fear that we cannot grow beyond, keeps us docile and obedient, loyal and defined, and leads us to accept oppression. When we thus live away from those erotic guides from within ourselves, then our lives are limited by external and alien forms, and we conform to the needs of a structure that disregards individual needs. However, when we begin to live in touch with the power of the erotic within ourselves, and allow that power to inform and illuminate our actions upon the world around us, then we begin to be responsible to ourselves in the deepest sense. And as we begin to recognise our deepest feelings, we begin to give up being satisfied with suffering and self-negation. Our acts against oppression become integral with self, motivated and empowered from within.

Cooking is an embodied act which accomplishes its desired results only through the complete bodily indulgence of the cook in the act, and her total identification with the ingredients involved. This very often means that the cook becomes the cooked as she/he allows to blend oneself into the process. The visceral description which accompanies Tita's attempt to castrate the roosters (28-29) brings forth a scream from Tita as she is disgusted at the idea of neutering the

creature. Tita sees herself in the creature and parallels the act with her own victimhood, and is taunted by self-pity.

In Desbiolles' novel, right at the commencement of the journey, the narrator justifies her choice of the mollusc and its recipe. From the moment she first sees a cuttlefish in the Monaco Aquarium, its transparent, milky whiteness and the graceful, languid mass of its body is found to be alluring. However, the creature remains quite elusive as it would not show itself up to most visitors, who therefore would pass by the window with the remark that it must be playing the dodger owing to a sense of shame because of the diaphanous shapelessness of its body. The mollusc effortlessly takes the protagonist to an episode in her own life which filled her with a similar sense of shame- the shame that she felt when operated upon to remove her festering appendix. It was the moment when the surgeon burst triumphantly into her room post the surgery, with the boisterous description of her ovaries. She says:

> I truly felt the shame I imagined the cuttlefish and I shared, shame that he could see my insides, show off with that, and most of all that he could see inside me the indubitable confirmation of my sex. Not only did I feel exposed, I felt confined, condemned to my future as a woman by the surgeon with the big gluttonous smile. (Desbiolles 4)

Her identification with the cuttlefish begins with this shared sense of shame and it advances further as the novel progresses, to become complete at the end, when the dish is prepared and ready to be consumed; to be engulfed. As she describes it at the start, "Maybe this is what growing up is: being able to eat what you were once ashamed to look at" (5). What attracts her most about the

cuttlefish is "the fragility of its dubious whiteness and the subtlety of its white mantle…those fragile, tiny, tangible white tufts that suddenly, with the help of a little wind, float miraculously around us..." (6). It is this cuttlefish-like weightlessness that she craves for- the desire to be the way one desires. A dish then, often becomes a safe and smooth conduit for the self of the cook to transfer itself to the partakers. It becomes a channel for communication. As Abarca says, cooking then "cements bonds- a vehicle for transforming food into gestures" (120) of love and other emotions.

Memory is embedded within both the fabric of the kitchen and the everyday encounters in that domestic space. Kitchens provide a conduit into the past by enabling reminiscences, materialising memory and facilitating the maintenance of embodied and emotional connections with events or people from the past. "It was very pleasant to savour its aroma, for smells have the power to evoke the past, bringing back sounds and even smells that have no match in the present. Tita liked to take a deep breath and let the characteristic smoke and scent transport her through the recesses of her memory" (Esquivel 12). As Pollack writes, in the kitchen, the "evocative objects…can transport us back to the warmth of another kitchen/person, the sights and smells of her cooking and the time spent there" (227). She adds, "It anchors one in the past, yet continues to create memories for the future" (227).

Theories of embodiment suggest that memory is not fixed once and for all, ready to be accessed when needed, but rather, a creative and mutating faculty that allows human beings relive the past, each time in different ways (Parasecoli 650). Towards the end of Mehran's novel, when Bahar finds her way through the stinging

pomegranate smoke in the Café kitchen and hunches over Thomas McGuire's lifeless body to puff out his chest and bring him back to life, she seems to have moved much from the dread-filled girl, passive and timid that she was, when years back in her apartment kitchen in Iran, she was intruded upon and attacked by Hossein, forcing her to strike him down in defence:

> Left on the stove for too long, the pomegranate soup had become a pulpy mass, the fructose residue sticking to the pot with a horrible smell. Half of the soup was already burnt to a black sludge, but the rest flowed freely down Hossein's head. He fell, his forehead struck by the hot lip of the heavy pan, as a scalding deluge of pomegranate juice engulfed his unconscious body. (282)

She realises finally that "If she wanted to survive, if she wanted to move forward, then she'd have to learn not to believe the worst from situations- or people for that matter" (345). From an apprehensive Bahar who feared even to hope, she emerges an empowered woman with a spirit to survive; to discover herself anew.

Present circumstances always inform how the past is remembered, showing us how memory gets "cultivated" (Meah and Jackson 7). Lowenthal notes that memories continually mutate to conform to the present concerns (214). Connerton distinguishes three kinds of memory- personal, cognitive and habit. Though the first two types have been studied extensively, little attention has been paid to the third category. Habit memory, Connerton opines, has "the capacity to reproduce a certain performance" (22). Habit is something that does not lend itself to the visual bias that is central to discursive analysis. In their insistence on the discursive, scholars transform the figurative into language, and text into discourse. And yet our memories are never

purely personal, purely cognitive, or purely textual. Citing Halbwachs, Connerton argues that the analytical separation of individual and social memory is meaningless.

To consider the formation of social memory, it follows, one must consider how those memories are constructed and conveyed through commemorative ceremonies. Connerton suggests that ritual is performative in the sense of Austin's notion of the performative utterance. That is, performatives constitute rather than reflect action. They are not limited to verbal utterances; they are also "encoded in set postures, gestures and movements" (Connerton 59). At the same time, ritual is formal in the sense that its structure and content are conservative and repetitive. Performativity and formalism are both mnemonic. Connerton's focus on ritual is both historical and embodied. He says, "For if ceremonies are to work for their participants, if they are to be persuasive to them, then those participants must not be simply cognitively competent to execute the performance, they must be habituated to those performances. This habituation is to be found…in the bodily substrate of the performance" (71).

Connerton demonstrates how bodily practices, the embodied substrata of performance, key cultural memory. In cultural memory, "the past is, as it were, sedimented in the body" (Connerton 72). The process of sedimentation occurs through two kinds of practices: inscription and incorporation. Inscribing practices include the storage and retrieval of texts in photographs, books, cassettes, cinema etc., and incorporating practices include body postures, gestures, facial expressions, body movements, and table manners.

Embodiment is not primarily textual, rather, the sentient body is culturally consumed by a world filled with forces, smells, textures, sights, sounds and

tastes, all of which trigger cultural memories. As Stoller says, "it evokes the past, manipulates the present, and provokes the future" (636). He identifies a power that devolves from embodiment- a power that construes and constructs identities. Cultural memory is fashioned and refashioned to produce and reproduce power. Stoller quotes Toni Morrison to establish that the body is a major repository of cultural memories "of the flesh" (638).

Lee contemplates that each individual, regardless of one's culinary experience, background, or training, carries a unique set of gustemic knowing. As a person cooks, he/she subconsciously consults his/her own inner "gustemic voice" (Lee 5), using his/her repository of food memories as a means to make the inedible edible. For Tita, this gustemic voice is the voice of the dead ranch cook Nacha- the consultative voice which helps her sail through her adventures in the kitchen. So skilfull was Tita "that it seemed Nacha herself was in Tita's body doing all those things: dry-plucking the birds, removing the viscera, getting them ready for frying" (Esquivel 47).

Nacha's guidance in fact extended beyond the precincts of the kitchen. She was a resourceful succour for Tita in times of contingencies. Tita was quite confident that if Nacha could tell her recipes in the kitchen, she would also be able to offer help in emergencies. Nacha whispered the instructions in her ear. And on another occasion, Tita could hear "Nacha's voice dictating a recipe, a prehispanic recipe involving rose petals" (46). For Ginny, it was always her mother's presence in the kitchen that guided her through cooking. Ginny says, "I could cook whenever and whatever I wanted, and she would buy me all the ingredients and utensils and pots and knives I asked for, and set aside half the shelves for my cookbooks. In return I would follow her rules" (McHenry 28). As

Kai-Sean Lee writes in his essay "Cooking up Food Memories: A Taste of Intangible Cultural Heritage", "The nuanced differences in gustemic knowing explains why when different foodmakers approach a standard recipe, the outcomes render considerably unalike. Foodmaking in this sense resembles an artistic creation—an expression of one's gustemic self" (5). In *Pomegranate Soup,* Bahar's deft hands work like a sculptor's to create magical dolmeh:

> Bahar, guided by a stern inner compass, smartly slapped each vine leaf (vein side up) on the chopping board. It was a consistent, methodical march that started with a no-nonsense scoop of stuffing with her left hand, followed by a skilled right-handed tuck of the vine leaf. Then, bringing the *dolmeh* to a clean surrender, she briskly rolled the vine leaf from the bottom up…Rolling was always where Layla faltered, for her method was more carefree and altogether too trusting. (Mehran 13)

So too, in *Like Water for Chocolate,* while preparing quail in rose petal sauce, Tita's culinary expertise is evident. She knows that:

> The quail must be dry-plucked because putting them in boiling water affects their flavour. That is just one of the many cooking secrets that can only be learned through practice. Ever since she had burned her hands on the griddle, Rosaura wanted nothing to do with any kind of culinary activity, so she was ignorant of that and many other gastronomical secrets (Esquivel 48).

When Gertrudis, another of Tita's sisters attempts to cook with a recipe, she falters. "Gertrudis read this recipe as if she were reading hieroglyphics. She didn't know how much sugar was meant by five pounds, or what a pint of water was, much less what this ball business was" (173).

Amanda in *The Kitchen Daughter: A Novel* resembles Gertrudis to a certain extent. Feeling no affinity for the home kitchen, she discards all the kitchen stuff after their parents' death, and plans to dispose of the house as well, upsetting the mental fabric of Ginny for a while, who finds it unable to comprehend the idea of losing her comfort zone of familiarity. Ginny is once heard to say as she is preparing to make Grandma Damson's shortbread, "I know the recipe is written down in Amanda's neat childhood print on the card in the cabinet. It was her first and the last contribution to a recipe project she'd lost interest in immediately" (McHenry 29).

Jennifer Brady uses cooking as a "means of garnering understanding about food, identity, and the body" (323). Brady argues that food making is a sensuous way of unravelling meaning pertaining to one's embodied knowledge and identity, by recognising "bodies as instrument[s] of sensory data collection" (323). Jon D Holtzman too notes that "the sensuousness of food is central to understanding at least much of its power as a vehicle for memory" (365). Memories are created amidst the encounters within an embodied and visceral in-between space of cooking.

Brady identifies five interlinked constructs which thread food memory: people and communality, food making and the body, sense and synaesthesia, emotional reveries and evocative sceneries. This, in short would mean people, embodiment, senses, emotions and sceneries. Together, the constructs form a "gustemic gestalt" (Lee 4) that intertwines and fills in missing gaps of a fragmented food-related past. The synaesthetic cooking that Sutton and Seremetakis discuss of, implying a crossing-over of the senses that entails in the memory of one sense getting stored in another, contributes to making cooking an embodied practice, creating an embodied culinary

mnemonics. Desbiolles' protagonist interprets this as the "music" (50) in cooking. She refutes the need of any other kind of music accompaniment while cooking:

> that would deprive yourself of the knife's gentle whisper against the tender skin of the egg-plant or the more rigid flesh of carrots, the light, but crisp sound of cleaning green beans, with delicate but brisk strokes on each side, and the obsessive repetition of these rustlings, murmurs, and tiny snips that help to soothe before the emotions of cooking and riskier transformations set in. For what a racket: sputtering, crackling, purring, whistling there is then, and oh, the beating heart. Music. (50)

There is an intense degree of sensoriality attached to each action while doing cooking- the act of seeing, touching, smelling, hearing, and of course tasting it. These, as Lupton argues, are sure to "evoke particular emotions on both the conscious and unconscious levels" (31). She points out a symbiotic relationship between food and emotions which is "commonly regarded as the preserve of the embodied self rather than the disembodied philosophising mind" (31). Parasecoli cites Schacter when he asserts that, "Memory seems to depend heavily on the body, not only because most of the material the mind elaborates originates from the senses, but also because the body and the emotions connected with it (pleasure, pain, fear) influence the way memories are stored and eventually retrieved" (650). He reiterates Lisa Heldke's view that, "Rational processes, hinging heavily on memories, cannot thus be totally isolated from what is traditionally considered irrational, physical, and instinctual" (650). Food memories do not only comprise material and sensorial aspects of food, but also the nuanced remembrances of social surroundings, communal practices, and bodily knowledge (Lee 1).

Hearth is the heart of home. Kitchen has an emotionally charted geography which renders it a revitalising capacity. Within its materiality there is a treasured trove- a mosaic of memories and moments, of emotions and events, of reflections and rigmaroles. It is a storied space where every element shouts out a narrative. Past is curated and remembered here in multivalent trajectories. It could sometimes be the design and structure, sometimes be the ritualised cooking moments and methods, sometimes the transgenerational material objects, sometimes the people who shared the space, sometimes cooked meals and shared tastes, and sometimes the smells and flavours. Owing to its affinity and undetachable association with food which is ephemeral, kitchen is often ascribed a transient image. Yet the fortitudinous presence of material objects and the senses and memories that linger in its atmosphere, easily convert this transience into a permanence. There is a "continuity" (Sutton *Bigger* 5) that is established with the past, through consistent transactions with the corpus of material objects in play.

Recipes in particular hold a special significance in this regard. Recipes, Annette Weiner says, are "inalienable possessions" (9) because of their associations with social memory and personal identity. Barbara Kirshenblatt- Gimblett has observed "how the highly perishable and ephemeral medium of food embodies core cultural values" (11) in the form of recipes. Recipe becomes a form of narrative, the discourse of which constructs the community just as it establishes personal identity, setting a clear divide between an insider and an outsider. They are "cultural artifacts that give us insight into the world around us, as our place in that world" (Cotter 52). A recipe can be viewed as a story, a cultural narrative that can be shared and has been constructed by members of a community. Cotter continues to say how her grandmother read her cookbooks because they carried elements that fired her

imagination, that drew her in, that caused her to reflect on her own behaviour (as a cook), and to construct her identity (53) in terms that were readily accessible to her and in relation to her peers. Her cookbooks took her beyond her own kitchen and into her community.

Suyoung Son calls recipes “bodily texts” (early in the talk) as they speak of the corporeality of female work. Women’s cooking becomes an outcome of physical, bodily work, bodily discipline, embodied skill, and knowledge. According to Suyoung, cookbooks embrace a broader sense of text and encompass a wider meaning of it than the usual lettered signification. They read beyond the undervalued status ascribed to this female body of knowledge that is encapsulated traditionally within cookbooks. Suyoung talks of how recipes “proliferate their meanings via the interplay of verbal and physical textualities”, mediating between “textual knowledge and embodied practice” (later in the talk). This becomes particularly significant with reference to recipe novels under study here. They belong to a genre of novels which fuse narratives and recipes- the reflective and the referential elements in one, manifesting itself as “edible ecriture” (Eagleton 1) that facilitates performance, and creates a blend of textual and embodied memory.

Besides recipes, kitchen tools also become significant mnemonic signifiers that embody personal and collective memories. A cast iron saucepan reminds Desbiolles’ protagonist of her past:

> Although this saucepan is new, my memory is seasoned with all of the aromas that wafted from my neighbour’s, mixed with those that wafted from my mother’s saucepans, forming an indecipherable bouquet. Ever since I have happily endeavoured to remember each one of its petals, those aromas and the

> salivation they give rise to, with the colors tossed together, the sound of what's caught in oil, what simmers or cooks slowly at cruising altitude, aromas, salivation, colors, sounds, whose remanence fully participates in these famous tricks of the trade. (62)

Amanda Hesser identifies kitchen utensils as potential tools which can establish a continuity in the otherwise transience-laden domain of kitchen. When most transactions in the kitchen move around the materiality of food, kitchen tools stand against them in contrast, rooted in durability, creating memories. They are "decommodified" (Hesser 15) and enter into people's identities and histories. These kitchen tools align deeply with Sutton's dialectics of continuity and change, as they last and yet change with the user. They become memory objects that "exist as testaments to previous social formations and sensory regimes, which can trigger desires in their owners…they are neither ephemeral nor unchanging" (Sutton and Hernandez *Voices* 1).

The Maussian idea of "fetishism" (33) also becomes significant in the interpretation of these kitchen tools. Mauss focuses on how objects become personified when they take on the histories and identities of their owners and recipients, and how the identities of the subjects get entangled with the objects they possess. This leads to a blurring of the divide between objects and subjects which he interprets as a kind of fetishism, a heightened sense of self and recognition. Sutton cites Cohen to add that, "A world devoid of fetishes would be like a world without memory, without language or meaning, uninhabitable by human beings" (Sutton and Hernandez *Voices* 68). Fetishism as a form of memory, emerges from the history of the actions performed with the objects, which in its turn invests itself as its value.

Value itself gets redefined here as that which "emerges in action: it is a process by which a person's invisible potency- capacity to act- is transformed into concrete, perceptible form…Rather than having to choose between the desirability of objects and the importance of human relations, one can now see both as refractions of the same thing" (Graeber 45). And as Sutton states, "kitchen tools reinforce memories" (Sutton and Hernandez *Voices* 68). Kitchen facilitates a routinized, everyday interaction between the past and present, through the culinary acts performed within it.

Cooking, however, is as much about change as it is about continuity. As Sutton rightly identifies, it is "never exactly the same as from one day to the next. It is always caught up in the contingencies of social situations, changing environments, recalcitrant ingredients and ordinary creativity" (*Bigger* 3). He goes on to suggest the notion of interpreting "cooking as risk" (34) wherein he offers the possibility of looking at it as an act that embodies an undertaking of continuity and change. While studying Greek Kalymnian cooking, he finds a broad cultural acceptance of the notion that value is created through embracing the contingent and risky. He quotes Sahlins' "subjective risk" (62), a term that describes the ways Greek understanding of historical processes shape their willingness to embrace and reward risk-taking as an everyday attitude. This "risk" (4) captures the dynamic tension that always exists between past, present, and future. Jens Zinn quotes John Maynard Keynes when he says, "Knowledge of the past is valuable but at the same time comes with systematic limits when we are dealing with innovation and the unknown of the future. This is…a typical character of everyday life" (23-24). The unfinished nature of cooking, and the fact that variation always creeps in, makes it ideal for thinking about the nexus between past, present and future, and even for realigning memory with a kind of sensory perception.

Kitchen as a space involves physical, cognitive, existential and interactional risks. In this space, cooks find ways to "embrace the possibilities afforded by contingency and change as much as they look for continuities in their daily practice" (Sutton *Bigger* 8). Risk, Sutton argues, has an "objective" (8) dimension too, wherein it is interpreted more as an "activity" (8) rather than a "thing" (8). As Zinn says, "when approaching risk as a process of 'doing', the social aspects more easily enter the debate, since risk does not exist independently of the people, organisations or other social instances, which 'perform' risk" (30). Risk, he says, is about "interrupting the ordinariness and repetitiveness of life which rewards us with an intensified feeling of being alive" (2). In his book *Bigger Fish to Fry,* when Sutton talks of "mundane cooking contingencies" (1), he highlights this "risk" (4) because when throwing together a dish, one could go too far and add something that simply did not taste right, or that did not go with the other ingredients.

Tita's emotions could in a way be categorised into risk elements because by allowing them into the dish, she takes the risk of altering the texture, flavour and effect of it on the partakers. These risky components are what bring "bitterness" (Sutton *Bigger* 44) into food, as a paraplegic Mama Elena complains, because she tastes Tita's *espirit libre* in them. Mama Elena could taste her daughter's daring creativity in the dishes she cooked for her. She could sense the breach of tradition and continuity, and smell change in them. When Tita cooks, what she risks therefore is not simply the potential for a good or a bad meal. She also risks her own sense of self as a competent cook, and the opinions of others- particularly her mother's- on her level of skill. When her mother spits and yells at her to get herself and the soup away from her sight, the rejection sends out a chill that snuffs out the faint flame of Tita's confidence that had been ignited by Dr John Brown earlier at his place.

In *The Kitchen Daughter: A Novel,* Gert's son David tries to give Ginny's 'magical' cooking skill a logical explanation. He says, "You're making other people's recipes, right?... And because of this syndrome, your memory, your obsession, I bet, you're making things *exactly* as the recipe tells you. You're doing Nonna's recipe exactly like Nonna would, or your mom's recipe exactly like your mom would. So that connects with them in some way" (McHenry 218). For Ginny, the real movement forward is accomplished only when she moves out of the grief-cooking, a conscious backward swimming which she performs well within her kitchen- her sphere of familiarity- and starts cooking in the grieving Jewish household outside. When she does that, she automatically lets go of her past memories that stultify her, embraces a grief which is not her personal one, and learns to move on. She swims away from her own personal grief to embrace the grief of others.

Each dish that Ginny prepares in her own kitchen is a performance wherein she turns away from the present, trying to get a grasp of the gone past. From Ribollita to Scottish shortbread, from Georgia Peach to omelette, she owes all of it to different people connected to her family, sometimes through ways known and sometimes through ways unknown to her- to Nona, her mother, her dad, Elsa and more. For Ginny, every act of cooking becomes a small step taking her closer towards self-actualisation. Her compelling sense of self is performed through her cooking. At the end, her obsession with exact, handwritten recipes which was pulling her back to be trapped within the mire of past memories, is exchanged for a liberating kind of cooking which is done in a field of unfamiliarity. This helps Ginny grasp the present and move on into the future. For Ginny, it is the Jewish household cooking which she does that becomes the progressive kind of cooking, bringing about a "rupture" (Sewell 227), a break in the otherwise "normal" (Sutton *Bigger* 82) cooking that she

does within her own kitchen. This brings in change, against the existing continuity. She lets go of the restricting recipes in hand, only to evolve and embrace.

Cooking as risk would also refer to the skilled, bodily practice involved in it. Luce Giard refers to this as the "parrying gestures" (de Certeau and Giard 205) which not only include things like knowing how to "flatten half cooked fish in order to remove the deadly bones" (205) but also knowing how to improvise "when fresh milk 'turns' on the stove, when meat taken out of the package and trimmed of fat, reveals itself to be not enough to feed four guests, or when…to make the leftover stew 'go a little farther'" (205). As Giard adds:

> Doing-cooking thus rests atop a complex montage of circumstances and objective data, where necessities and liberties overlap, a confused and constantly changing mixture through which tactics are invented, trajectories are carved out, and ways of operating are individualized. Every cook has her repertoire, her grand operatic arias for extraordinary circumstances and her little ditties for a more familial public, her prejudices and limits, preferences and routine, dreams and phobias. (201)

These are the tactics that each cook has internalised to face daily dangers in the kitchen, which are as much social and sensory as they are material. One of Tita's personal contingencies was to not let Pedro's roses for her be simply discarded as they contained his love for her as she believed, but which, according to Mama Elena, was sure to contaminate the marriage of Pedro and Rosaura. This desire, along with her embodied knowledge and skill of cooking, help her promptly retrieve the recipe for rose petal sauce from her memory. This skilled practice can also be seen as a kind of risk, one identified by craft theorist David

Pye as the "workmanship of risk" (20) which continues to be cited today by those exploring the embodied and sensory intricacies of craft practice. In this, the "quality of the result is not predetermined, but depends on the judgement, care and dexterity which the maker exercises as he works (Adamson 73).

Pye imagined a continuum on which the workmanship of risk was at one end, and "the workmanship of certainty" (20) on the other. The latter involved processes of making, where risk had been largely removed. This would be like cooking from a recipe sans any changes- performing the recipe verbatim. Pye argues that creativity can come only through risk. Skill means there is variability, possibility of control, and different outcomes. As Pierre Bourdieu observes, "Creativity is evident in the embodied practices of these women, particularly how the commingling of food and ingredients with experience of cooking was simply natural to their "body hexis"" (87). Skilled systems allow for the possibility of changing course midstream, and this allows the possibility of learning from errors, as well as a kind of making that draws on unexpected memories and analogies.

Just as cooking is about conjuring comfort memories and nostalgia-laden cherished past, it is also about effacing the conflicted ones overlaid with trauma and contestations. When the former propels a movement forward, the latter stands as a stultifying force pulling backwards, and hence necessitating redressal. For Marjan, the heavy baggage of bitter memories around Ali, Iran's Gohid Detention Centre, the prostitute Khanoum Zanganeh's alchoholic banter, physical and mental abuse, starvation and lot more, is what she had left behind in Iran, though "Eight years on, and the memory of the old prostitute's kind offering still set Marjan's stomach rumbling with unexplainable hunger" (Mehran 179). Marjan

"loved the smell of baking *lavash* bread, she couldn't deny the hint of dread she felt each time she rolled out the dough for a new batch" (179). Bahar tries to evade the brutal memories of "of reactionary chadors proliferating in their kitchen" (219) in Iran, her marriage to Khanoum Jaferi's son, Hossein Jaferi, the man with deep facial indentations who left her with a violet of burst veins and torn ear-lobe, thighs embossed with thick baton grooves- all leaving unseen deep wounds within her.

For Desbiolles' protagonist, it is a daring attempt to run away from the nauseous stereotyping and obnoxious uncertainties. The cuttlefish, for her, is a reminder of her shame, of her most intimate sexuality exposed and detailed by a stranger, a surgeon. The narrative presents a journey of transformation of the creature from life to death. The live animal is presented as a white, mute, and shy creature that echoes a floating female figure who seeks refuge in her daydreaming. The stuffing and cooking of the cuttlefish offers an opportunity for self-discovery and renewal for the protagonist.

Jean Marie-Floch has rightly said that food often embodies a "permanent dialectics between the attachments to our origins' model, with its emblematic, or totemic dishes, its recipes, its rituals and practices", and "the need to ceaselessly explore, seeking new tastes, new savouries, new recipes, or manners of doing and being. Food is caught in the dialectics of withdrawal, of return to the origins, to tradition, and at the same time", its opposite, "of exploring, discovering, looking for the surprise and the search for the unexpected" (Boutaud et al 1). This dialectic shapes and defines our identity construction between finding refuge in a

frame, in order to retrieve our own being, and escaping from this frame and discovering oneself throughout new worlds of flavours and sensations.

Cooking often stands as a cultural process understood in terms of these dialectics between constancy and mutability; between text and context; between objective and subjective; between culture and self. Tita records the recipes, together with her accompanying story, because the situation of the recipe, is inseparable in her mind from the instructions for preparing the dish itself. What is implicit in Tita's salvaging of Nacha's recipes in their context is a sense of the art of recipe narration as "embedded discourse" (Leonardi 342)- "like a story, a recipe needs a recommendation, a context, a point, a reason to be" (340).

Marjan and her sisters carry Iran and their home with them to Ballinacroagh, in the form of remembered recipes. When they open their Babylon Café on *No Rooz*, the Iranian New Year, in the Main Mall, they remove the petrified remains and stony clumbs of baguettes and bread loaves of the Italian Delmenico Café and replace the bland and monotonous food of Ballinacroagh with their ambrosial Persian food which Marjan cooks from "the recipe book filed away in her head" (Mehran 42). And in *The Kitchen Daughter: A Novel,* McHenry herself has commented on the autobiographical spark in her novel. She acknowledges, "Nearly all of them are family recipes, so they're important to me because of who made them and where they came from. Pierogi from the Ukranian branch of the family, Cornish pastries from the English side, rum cake and bourbon balls at Christmas" (284). She continues to say:

> The recipe inspiration came from all sorts of places. In some cases the characters drove the recipes, and sometimes it was the other way around. I

> wanted a Cuban character because I wanted to include a recipe for picadillo, and I read this fascinating interview with a Jewish-Cuban woman, and that's how Gert came to be…Elena is from Peru…. (287)

Holtzman opines that memory involves a range of different processes- both social and individual, rather than being pinned down empirically and objectively to notions of 'truth' in the way history might be. Memory, he says, "intricately destabilises truth through a concern with the subjective ways that the past is recalled, memorialised and used to construct the present" (363). Food and memory for him, are "floating signifiers" (363), shifting and ever evolving, creating an arena of possibilities.

In all the four chosen novels, the protagonists' encounters with food and cooking are delectably and attractively wrapped in their emotions, senses and memories. They indulge in the preparation of dishes with their sense of touch, smell, sight, sound and taste, and are nurtured in their turn by the result. Each dish they prepare becomes their signature creation of their skill and a re-creation of their embodied memory. Their sensual and embodied knowledge when invested in their act of cooking, demystifies the act, and empowers them.

What is generally regarded as the "unspectacular" (Lane 93) becomes rewarding and renewing an act, with the engagement of the senses. Food memory is an embodied sense in itself. The protagonists muster a set of sensory stimulants to remember things, times, places and presences lost. This "summoned organoleptics" of the kitchen, "become abodes for an unforgettable past" (Bachelard 19). In the in-between space of kitchen, the present and past converge and stretch into the future. And these mnemonic values embedded in kitchens and

food preparation practices, facilitate creativity and build possibilities that birth alternatives. With a perfect folding in of memory that is delicately and perfectly invested in fair shares in the head, heart and hands, magic unfolds in and through food.

To quote Luce Giard again:

> Provisions, preparation, cooking, and compatibility rules may very well change from one generation to another, or from one society to another. But the everyday work in kitchens remains a way of unifying matter and memory, life and tenderness, the present moment and the abolished past, invention and necessity, imagination and tradition-tastes, smells, colors, flavors, shapes, consistencies, actions, gestures, movements, people and things, heat, savorings, spices, and condiments. (de Certeau and Giard 222)

Through each act of cooking, which becomes a sensuous re-enactment of their embodied memory, the protagonists perform their selves; reclaim their lost voices. Embracing the stasis and the continuum which define cooking, these characters progress and transgress, to carve out a niche for themselves. Just as it redefines the raw ingredients and transform them into edible forms, cooking transforms and redefines the cook to achieve a renewed sense of self and subjectivity.

Chapter 4

Delectable Defiances

"It is always possible to have a space from which you can practise that which is prohibited in other spaces; it is always possible to annex other areas and to set up other territories. And this practice of transfer and transformation reorganises the given sociological structure" (Lawless 227). When Cecelia Lawless borrows Josefina Ludmer's words from "Tretas del debil", what she tries to articulate is the latent potential and power embedded in the space of kitchen, which offers an agency to refute and resist, and helps transform oneself and others, if required. When extended, the thought of kitchen as a heterotopia convincingly proves this space to be a site of resistance as well. A traditionally ascribed femininity tends to associate kitchen with passivity, oppression, meekness, silence and suffering. The possibilities of resistance and deviance are very well embedded within the kitchen space and its associated elements, specifically including the culinary virtuosities of the cook and the actual act of preparing food. The resistances enacted through cooking from within the domestic kitchens, when paired with creativity, stand distinct and sometimes become polemical.

In theories of resistance, agency comes from the hands of revolutionaries "below" (Hollander and Einwohner 536) who attempt to refashion consciousness and protest institutions, policies and persons in power, unlike theories of domination such as Gramscian concept of hegemony, Foucauldian notion of knowledge as power, or Marxian notion of capital and ownership, which have studied structure and power and have looked at change as is imposed from dominant structures 'above'. The culinary can effectively be one such ground from where subtle resistances and silent

subversions can be initiated. “My rebellions have always been small ones” (McHenry 39). So speaks Ginny in McHenry’s novel *The Kitchen Daughter: A Novel*. Yet culinary can be repurposed and proven to be not just an act purposed for preparing food for sustenance of the body but also as a distinct revolutionary gesture that allows one to perform emotions and provides scope for mental sustenance. Though small and subtle, resistance can be articulated by a cook through her kitchen acts.

The organisers of a conference held in 1984, dedicated to the writings of Latin American and Latina women, proclaimed the importance of the kitchen for women writers when they published the conference proceedings under the title *The Frying Pan by the Handle*. In her essay “Latin American Women Writers’ Novel Recipes and Laura Esquivel’s like Water for Chocolate”, Janice Jaffe cites the editor Patricia Elena Gonzalez, who summarises the conference’s discussions of women’s writing, with a metaphoric call to take up pots and pans: “We could say that as we cut the onion, we cried; but upon peeling off the layers superimposed artificially over our identity as Latin American women, we found a centre. Alright now, time to take the frying pan by the handle and start cooking” (201).

Luce Giard identifies three prime aspects that are involved in the operations that shape culture. In her essay in Michel de Certeau’s work *The Practice of Everyday Life,* Giard writes:

> The first aspect of these operations is aesthetic: an everyday practice opens up a unique space within an imposed order, as does the poetic gesture that bends the use of common language to its own desire in a transforming reuse. The second aspect is polemical: the everyday practice is relative to the power relations that structure the social field as well as the field of knowledge. To appropriate

> information for oneself, to put it in a series, and to bend its montage to one's own taste is to take power over a certain knowledge and thereby overturn the imposing power of the readymade and preorganized. It is, with barely visible or namable operations, to trace one's own path through the resisting social system. The last aspect is ethical: everyday practice patiently and tenaciously restores a space for play, an interval of freedom, a resistance to what is imposed (from a model, a system, or an order). To be able to do something is to establish distance, to defend the autonomy of what comes from one's own personality. (254-255)

There is a careful adherence to all the above mentioned aspects- aesthetic, polemical and ethical- in the narratives under study, which facilitates a smooth dismantling of the pre-established and imposed conventions and stereotypes. The novels chosen for study speak of the subversive potential of food and its preparation. Kitchen and cooking, are often essentialised as feminine in the traditional discourses which stereotype them as non-intellectual and insignificant. They are imaged as restrictive and repressive female affairs. Yet the protagonists under study, prove them to be otherwise, by subverting them in their own subjective ways. They emerge out of the constricting stereotypes and shake off the imposed restrictions to reach towards empowerment. Cooking is made their modus operandi to accomplish their goals and desires. It is employed as a weapon to establish themselves. Cooking renders them voice. It helps them to be heard. A subliminal stepping-beyond is achieved, and in the process, cooking itself gets redefined as a constructive act rather than a constrictive stasis.

Empowerment sets in when the "cult of domesticity" (Roy 43) ceases to be yoked with passivity and debilitation. The strategy in the novels under study is subversion of these "feminine" (43) spaces to accomplish their own selves. Literature abounds with narratives where food becomes an element of subversion. Manju Kapur's protagonist Tara in the short story "Chocolate" prepares delectable dishes to lure her infidel husband to become obese and unhealthy and thereby takes her revenge upon him for his disgust towards her own bulk and "jiggling rolls of flesh" (71). Mary Malone in "Lamb to the Slaughter", a typical, meek, middle-class young twentieth century housewife seems to have internalised the 'ideal' and 'docile' but abruptly turns the tables by murdering her husband with a heavy frozen leg of lamb for speaking of an impending separation he has planned from her, and tactfully bakes it in the oven and feeds his friends the same. Victims turn into victors here, thanks to food which alters the consequences. The nourishing aspect of food is vengefully subverted to become destructive. Although "locked in" (Woolf 29), these protagonists choose to lock themselves out. The Malayalam film *The Great Indian Kitchen*, a 2021 release, has a protagonist who collects the drain water from beneath the unrepaired kitchen sink, to use it as a weapon against her chauvinistic husband and father-in-law, before she chooses to lock them inside the kitchen and walk her way into independence. These protagonists give themselves a voice through their vengeful acts from within the kitchen. They defy the notion of submission and surrender.

In her study of Manju Kapur's works, Malashri Lal questions:

> Food is linked to memory, to the legacy of foremothers whose oral texts of recipes and hands-on teaching of a complex skill have kept family traditions alive and rich. If a woman is the repository of such cultural knowledge and the

> potential disseminator of this wisdom, can she be treated by patriarchy as marginal and unimportant? (163-164)

Culinary writings by women, adds Malarshi Lal, explore "the implications of feminist power precisely in the arena where the woman is deemed to have been powerless" (164). Sananda Roy, in her article What Do You Want for Dinner, Honey?: The Subversive Power of Food" points out how these narratives "perform a transvaluation of patriarchal system of codes by showing cooking as an empowering tool for the woman" (47).

Power, when it is interpreted in its base essence, is that which fundamentally limits those beings over whom it is wielded. As Ann Johansson and Stephen Vinthagen write in their book, *Conceptualising Everyday Resistance: A Transdisciplinary Approach*:

> In Foucauldian sense, power is something practiced in all social relations throughout society, on all levels and in indeterminate struggles, negotiations and changing relations of forces. In line with Foucault, power is understood as sometimes forbidding, but primarily productive and basically decentered, heterogenic and plural, however, sometimes taking somewhat more stable forms, as "domination". (18)

Aside from the dominant forces which are focused and studied in the Foucauldian framework, resistance is an equal force to be reckoned with, though they are not always of the dramatic and visible kind; not always overt in forms of violence, riots, demonstrations and protests; not always organised, collective and institutional.

Resistance can rarely be synonymous with overt revolutions. James C Scott points out in his work *Domination and the Arts of Resistance,* that resistance is also of

the subtle kind- "quiet, dispersed, disguised or otherwise seemingly invisible" (Johannsson and Vinthagen 19)- which he terms "infrapolitics" (Scott 183); "the everyday resistance" (Johannsson and Vinthagen 19). Though Antonio Gramsci, Karl Polanyi and others also talk about resistances, Gramsci's "counter-hegemony" (20), Polanyi's "counter- movements" (20) and others, foreground the principled, collective, political rebellions, whereas Scott's infrapolitics projects individual acts of resistance in everyday life- often covert.

Since everyday resistances are most often disguised or concealed, they sometimes go unnoticed and unrecognised, and remain elusive. Scott in his work "Everyday Forms of Resistance", speaks of how these resistances are "small scale" (35), "relatively safe" (35) and evolve into a "*pattern* of resistance" (36). He identifies it to be existent among all kinds of subcultures. He claims that the concealment of these resistances could be achieved either through the disguise of the resisting actor (resister) or through the "concealment of the act itself" (Johansson and Vinthagen 26). As open contestations are absent in these resistances, the effects/results may not always be polemical or overtly disrupting, particularly when in isolation. However, as Heredia points out, what attains significance here are the patterns set by these acts in repetition. Heredia associates the everyday to such patterns which recur in the everyday lives of people. So does power as well, as it often gets reproduced in the acceptance and adherence of norms, hierarchies, structures and stereotypes. Everyday resistance then becomes "the silent, mundane and ordinary patterns of acts that are normalised" (Johansson and Vinthagen 28). There probably is nothing particularly "spectacular" (Jefferess 8) or extraordinary, as how Bhabha describes, in these everyday resistances. Owing to this very same reason, these resistance acts are at the risk of being relegated. What gets validated and privileged as legitimate and true

resistance is often the visible, loud, public protests and defiances which operate toward political goals. The non-political and the private; the personal and the emotional, are treated as irrelevant and insignificant, lacking in privilege and potential. As Scott says, acts that deviate from hegemonic understandings of politics or resistance tend not to achieve recognition.

Home cooks are more than resistant. They are actively creative in producing something new that is grounded in the familiar, as they are responsive to a network of social relations. Michel de Certeau adds the component of creativity to the concept of everyday resistance. While Scott privileges the intention of the resisters, de Certeau adds impetus to the creative maneuverings of "events, spaces, practices, symbols and materialities in order to turn them into opportunities" (Johansson and Vintahgen 40). What de Certeau identifies as everyday resistances are the mundane and small acts by ordinary people where they creatively use what is designed and doled out to them by the hegemonic power structures and institutions. de Certeau's is a clear downplaying of Foucauldian idea of discipline when he stresses on the creative competency embedded in the quotidian realms, from which emerge "historic social practices that did not become power strategies, but still exist and might subvert dominant discourses and practices" (43). However, Johansson and Vinthagen identify a mean position between the resistance ideas posited by Scott and de Certeau, by describing everyday resistance as a practice and in constant opposition and interaction with power. They argue that what matters most in resistance acts is the context wherein the resisters have a deep understanding of themselves and their subjectivities:

> Resistance is always situated in a context, a historic tradition, a certain place and/or social space forged by those who rebel. And even, not to say especially,

> when resistance is innovative, experimental and creative, it needs to build on the material left by other rebels- stories, myths, symbols, structures and tools available in that special situation. (8)

Everyday resistance is about the "*way of using* imposed systems" (42) - a set of manipulative tactics in their ordinary and daily activities to turn or subvert "the actual order of things to their own ends" (42). In the novels considered for study, domestic cooking becomes a quotidian act that helps the protagonists to create a spatial cocoon for themselves, distanced from the oppressive agents, structures and individuals- a space to breathe and manoeuver; a space for independence and ingenuity.

The principles of Scott and de Certeau are borrowed to study the resistance acts embedded in the narratives. Hence, equal impetus is given to the intentions, the actual acts themselves and the ways of acting. The cooking that the protagonists perform in the novels can be viewed as "hidden transcripts" (Scott *Arts* 14), as it helps each one of them "sustain and develop their everyday resistance, survival activity, sense of dignity" (Johansson and Vinthagen 55) and in their "mundane, repetitive and non-dramatic way of subverting domination" (52), they acquire an almost invisible character (de Certeau and Giard 34). Cooking becomes their resistive means to subvert the oppressive conditions in which they are caught. It often remains politically unrecognised- "imperceptible politics" (Johansson and Vinthagen 56), and they engage in this practice to bring about transformation.

Resistance and power are ontologically connected and deeply entangled. And power by itself is plural in nature- operating in multitudinal shapes and situations. Resistance too, owing to its entwinement with power, follows suit. It resorts to different techniques in different relations and different contexts. One stops existing

sans the other. However, just as we try to comprehend this interdependent, complex, interactive and contextual dynamic between power and resistance, it becomes pertinent to understand the latter as a force by itself that "undermines, destabilizes or even tries to go beyond power, creating other ways of life and ways of being" (62).

Every modality of identity, in terms of gender, race, class and others gets entrenched through the creation and recreation "in repetitive and embodied normative acts in the everyday" (64), enacting dominant power relations. As Judith Butler identifies, the potential for resistance therefore lies in "the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style" (520), countering and undermining those subtle, informal forms of power. The disciplining machineries of power consistently seek to establish and impose the code of norms; the mechanism of normalisation, as Foucault points out. Though he does not make any overt references to everyday resistance, Foucault believes in the "techniques of the self" (Johansson and Vinthagen 66) which are linked to resistance, and he points out the possibilities embedded in the creative practices of self-formation- the possibilities for transformation and modification- scope for becoming, and not merely being. Cooking in the novels studied here, offers itself as an alternative mode of self-making.

Elissa Underwood Marek, in her article "Recipes for Resistance and Abolition: Crafting a Culinary Discourse while incarcerated" argues that recipes on their own, offer opportunities for resistance and activism. Recipe fiction works become effective channels that present alternatives to violence, open rebellions and protests; to create and forge an enticing food sensibility through embodied and emotional responses to food and its preparers. These narratives mobilise food as a crucial means of defiance for the cooks to achieve the result of recovering and realising their selves. It is

interesting to note Laurel Forster's citation of Maria McGrath who observes that, "at the end of the restless 1960s, when the second wave feminists loudly petitioned against women's homebound invisibility, the authors of *Laurel's Kitchen* reinvested the kitchen and mothers with moral and countercultural significance. *Laurel's Kitchen* made a bold appeal for women to spend more time in the kitchen" (10). In calling back women to the kitchen, the authors were envisaging a return to the traditional roles as a means for these women to attain agency. It proposes a new approach to exercising female power over the family's food practices, a defiant spirit, a consciousness-raising and a return to a deeper knowledge of food and the self. This was a kind of "power feminism" (Taylor 188) where "embracing femininity becomes an act of defiance" (188). A similar line of thought is posited by Arlene Avakian too, where she reads cooking as a complex act that goes much beyond mere victimisation, offering instead, an avenue for creative expressions, nostalgic ruminations, sensual delights, and agential acumen to resist.

While investigating the resistances staged by Desbiolles' protogonist, one is forced to follow the trajectory and course of the cooking that she does for a set of imagined/anticipated acquaintances. When the narrator at the outset acknowledges that the recipe itself begins with a mistake, the readers sense an element of risk involved, as yet, she is not deterred from proceeding with the same. Rather, this risk could be renamed resistance of a subtle kind, as she decides to substitute cuttlefish with calamari and yet call it cuttlefish. We see an unequivocal establishment of her agential authority as a cook in her kitchen. As the cooking progresses, at each phase, her identification with the cuttlefish being cooked becomes more close and complete. The narrator grows from a stage where she is trying to grapple with her own identity and is dismayed at the sudden and boisterous proclamation and visceral description of

her orange ovaries by the surgeon, to a stage where she feels “a fondness for the man who chose to pass himself off as a dim-witted brute rather than reveal what was hatching inside” (Desbiolles 76) her. She feels a sense of gratitude for the man who restrained himself to the garish colour of that which established her femininity and not “divulge to enormity of what had developed inside” (76) her. She acknowledges, “I was the one who was indecent, carrying around an aberration, not the surgeon who had chosen to emphasise my glaring normality, to announce what linked me unquestionably with life” (76-77). She continues, “The smile I had found carnivorous and boorishly triumphant was in fact a rallying cry to the world of the living, a sign to encourage me not to let what plagued me get the better of me” (77).

The creature cuttlefish accommodates within itself a wide array of contradictions- its “transparent, milky whiteness” (3) when alive, almost making it invisible in life, and visible in death, with its mottled skin when placed on the cooking counter, dead and lifeless; its pulsating cavity as against the graceful, “languid mass of its body” (3); how in its “trembling white” (5) it clouds itself in black when it has to protect itself. The narrator reinterprets the reason for the cuttlefish’s ‘shame’- its running away from the prying eyes of the viewers in the aquarium. What is misinterpreted as its shame, in the eyes of the narrator, is more of a subtle kind of resistance. It runs away from others describing and defining it; commenting on its ‘ugliness’, its ‘shapelessness’. The narrator understands how this could make anyone /anything “confined, condemned to” (4) one’s own future, as she was once, “by the surgeon with the big gluttonous smile” (5). As she posits, she does not hate truth, but such “confirmations” (4) make us lose sight of truths by exposing it so deliberately, that we lose the contours, even the flesh and its subtle variations, and are left with nothing but the blow that’s been dealt us- “a bit like seeing all black after you stare

straight into the sun" (5). It is like one single truth obliterating all the others and curbing other possibilities and restricting the width of the spectrum of truth. The narrator articulates the harm that categorisation does to distinctiveness, as the former is often yoked with expectations. She wonders:

> What decides these things?... Is it intrinsic to our nature, as they say? Or is it our actions, like variation in the terrain, that make us branch off here, or turn there, and choose a certain path? Lord, where would we be without our tastes, what would distinguish us from one another? And do they really belong to us as much as we'd like to think? (6-7)

She is the cook, and she decides the structure of the meal. It is her discretion to have dessert or not. She justifies personal preferences as distinctiveness, and accommodates her childhood act of defiance, of fleeing, "to play the shy unsociable child" (7)- which she actually was not- within it. Though done with no particular reason for the first time then, it gradually habituates itself and develops into her nature, as she admits. She speaks about it, "I must have enjoyed that sensation of fleeing, the freedom you get when you vanish from sight, so much so it seems that ever since that day, I like to slip away from others. It's a secret desire…prefer to turn my back and choose to be alone" (7) -the way she likes. There is a strong essence and fragrance of resistance in these gestures. It is the same desire that is evident in her fondness of the freedom offered by an enshrouding fog. She says, "The fog suited me to a tee…I, too, would soon be revealed and I sank into despair. I started to pull on the fog with all my might, the way I would pull on a stage curtain, but there were only tatters left in my hand and the fog lifted unrelentingly to the sky while light

swallowed it from above" (54-55). She enjoys the comfort of concealment offered by the fog.

Desbiolles' protagonist identifies cooking as an act of ridicule, where one gets to tame, control and convert what is bitter, dreadful and foul, into an enticing and edible form. She says, cooking is "consuming death, making it yours, masticating it slowly, savouring it, smacking your lips over it" (19). What was virulent and pulsating is transformed into a placid and passive comestible. She distinguishes between a sense of happiness and a sense of humour here. The former to her simply means a feeling associated with imaginary cooking at imagined picnics in childhood where handkerchiefs become table cloths, chestnut leaves become fish and daisies be delicacies of sorts. The latter however, is a feeling of accomplishment, or a sense of triumph achieved at actual transformative cooking like that of the intimidating, tentacled cuttlefish being reserved and stuffed and sauted to a flavourful dish. The protagonist says:

> I am all the more captivated by the grace of the cuttlefish unfurling its long hair in the waters because I will never understand it, whatever understanding it may be. Unless I eat it. Eating cuttlefish, is that not in fact to appropriate a little of its grace (the way people once thought that eating your enemy's liver gave you his strength) and triumph over the fear it causes me, the cuttlefish and its kingdom of water. I remember the pleasure I got from eating crocodile one day in Australia. I also remember when I was a child the sudden decision my grandmother made to kill and cook a rooster that had jumped in my face one morning when I walked into the hen house. She served it to us at lunchtime and I ate heartily. Never had a sentence seemed more just. The next morning I

> walked into the hen house without fear. The other roosters had to behave themselves, for hadn't I intimately experienced what had become of a rooster's arrogance? (83-84)

She articulates her wish to be unselfconscious; her feeling of being taunted by a taste of incompleteness; how she despises the fact that words often fall back among them "dessicated and pale from never really having said what" (21) they wanted. What pleases her the most are occasions that do not demand anything. She desires, "an incredible sense of lightness from not expecting anything" (21), for which she admires the man at the bus stop who walks up to her to tell her that she is a real woman. Though it first sparks off an annoyance within her owing to her misjudgement of the man's remark as an attempt to typecast- akin to the surgeon's- the completion of the remark makes him more endearing to her when she hears, "You are a real woman, when, by some miracle, you meet a man" (23). It dawns on her, thanks to the man, that femininity can be customised and shaped by each woman. She says, "I knew intimately what he meant, knowing how much only another person…could make what is referred to as femininity adjust itself perfectly to me and make me a real woman, without shame, without embarrassment, without that gnawing feeling" (24) and she adds, "Only Pelleas saw the hair of Melisande as boundless, filled with the song of the endless and deadly sea, whereas for Goland, her hair was only beautiful" (25). She goes on to quote the image of her childhood neighbour, Cinderella's Godmother (as she is referred to), as she ponders on the definitive elements, if at all they exist, of a real woman. She says of the woman, "She knew how to fish, recognised birds by the song, killed pigeons by holding…nested" (29); woman who said "*dace* for *days,* or the opposite, *zlip* for *slip.* She was a little precious

whenshe said these words, sure that her pronunciation was right while everyone else's was wrong" (30-31).

The defiant energy that has crept into her fabric becomes evident in the pattern of memories that cooking invokes in her. Quite strangely and subversively, "the woven aromas that cooking concocts" (35) drift her to the memories and scent of lilacs- a blatantly natural fragrance- "an opposite of what is cooking" (35). It also draws her to the memory of her neighbour seen once "desperately clinging to a man" (37), looking like she was about to fall but on a more intense scrutiny, "seemed to be boiling over" (37). What Desbiolles tries to project through this image is that of a woman spilling over, to reach beyond the oppressive stereotypes, and for which, sometimes, she is made to look "like a madwoman" (37). The protagonist acknowledges that "nothing could be worse than being subjected" (38). She sniffs out the stench in the pigeonholes that society coerces her into. She shares with the readers her desire to defy this phenomenon. She says, "Just like the woman…neither fish nor flesh" (40). Her contempt for this pinning down is expressed in the way she describes the surgeon's elaboration of her ovaries as "dreaded obscenity" (40). There is a constant and tiring rebellion within her, waged against the imposed self which is a product of societal/cultural expectations. She says, "This all-round rebellion is exhausting me" (41). Her cooking becomes an art of persistent negotiation between her true and affective selves; her inner and outer selves. She enjoys the 'surprises' in cooking, as opposed to an attempt towards forced submission. She desires:

> That everything be lost, that everything fail, be inedible, that everything look as though it came out of a witch's cauldron and you serve the stew sneering, the guests being unable to declare the good fairy good, which they wouldotherwise

> never miss the chance to do. The fairy is just a bit of a fairy just as the witch is just a bit of a witch. But what do you expect? (41)

In one of the latter phases of her cooking which involves sewing up the stuffed bodies of the cuttlefish, she performs alchemy rather than reparation. She is heard to say in the novel that "sewing was no longer mending or patching up, but a painful and anxious form of alchemy that transformed two foreign parts, joining them with needle and thread into a third" (57). This sewing, she feels, is quite different from the more challenging type of sewing done on clothes- intricate and meticulous. Cuttlefish sewing is more appealing to her owing to its roughness and flexibility- its tolerance of imperfections. What she seeks through this is the courage to embrace the imperfections of her own self- the "courage not to fear it, but even more to rejoice in it" (61). What is not-so-neatly stuffed into the cuttlefish, are her imperfections, and she seeks courage in letting its contents spill over the stitch; courage in the articulation of her flaws; courage in acknowledging an overt display of affectations to please and set one's distinctiveness- the tiring attempts that can sometimes drown your true self to death. "A whole life spent sweating blood and tears to differentiate ourselves, to push our heads above water and wave our arms around until we get so exhausted by this strange and difficult move that we get cramps, we almost drown, we do drown" (70).

Eventually the protagonist matures out to forgive the surgeon's act of revealing her femininity, by describing it as:

> An exquisite sense of discretion… Truth be told, the surgeon who had seemed worse than an ogre when he discussed my ovaries had done so deliberately, to talk about something else, to turn the conversation, as they say, away from the

> crucial point to avoid shedding light on something much more secret than my orange ovaries. (76)

The fondness for the surgeon is ascribed to his sensibility to keep the secret about the "egg of death" (77) to himself; the egg of aberration she carried within; the paradox of it all.

Cooking helps Desbiolles' narrator, to scrip her own life. Each dish prepared, rakes up a set of memories and associated words, which speak of life lessons. Cooking opens up a wide arena of possibilities and pluralities; a tall gamut of stories and narratives. "I am fully engrossed in my cooking, for cooking is what puts words to my memory, my dreams, it's through cooking that I remember and let my mind wander. Another dish would have made me anew with other stories. Another dish would have given me another life" (78). Each dish, she implies, crafts its own story of transformation. "In no time they have taken on that golden-brown color that cuts them off from the dead. They are no longer dead, they make us hungry. We have taken possession of death. We have gilded it" (78).

Cooking unlocks the strong and the powerful insides. It draws one towards and helps one understand and come to intimacy with the unknown which lies untapped and dormant inside. Cooking, the narrator says:

> opened the doors to the unknown and the unknown smelled so wonderful that it could not have been entirely bad. As for witches, I knew they didn't open anything; they imprison, they lock children up, sometimes even in their oven, in order to cook them like the witch who lured Hansel and Gretel into her gingerbread house with the sugar-glazed windows. Witches don't teach children to like strong and powerful things, they get them all sticky with candy. (93-94)

She dislikes civility, which is the corollary of cooking. It does not please her much to please others through cooking. What she prefers to such affectations rather is the raw face, raw words which are often lost though, and remain invisible and unheard, smothered by the pretentious substitutes:

> Your raw face, they won't see it; your raw words, they won't hear them. Your raw face and words would be too frightening and too magnificently lost for anyone to ever see or hear. Even *you* cannot maintain them. They scarcely belong to you anymore and almost drag you away, far away, to where the sea is not frozen with spiked, motionless waves, to where the sea sweeps along the dead and the living alike, jumbled together, to where there is nothing in the sea but the fervour of movement. (96)

Cooking eventually helps her understand that it is about the dialectics between "*constancy*" (112) and "*fever*" (112); consistency and fervour that conjoin to make possible a transformation. She says:

> In order to find the right words, the words that fit, you need calm and a kind of passion, perhaps even fury; I think of souffles, of cakes magnificently risen in the oven, I think of the patience required to make them, elevated, exhausted, in the furious heat of the oven, I think of beaten egg whites, the whites shaken with rage until they lose their pathetic phlegm white consistency and reach the ineffable solidity of snow; it's strange that at the same time you need constancy and fever, so seemingly distant at first glance, lean on each other and support each other like two merry-makers at the end of a wedding. (111-112)

The chapters of the novel follow a procedural format as the protagonist follows the cooking instructions for stuffed cuttlefish. The free flow of the narrative is

accomplished with the reminiscences invoked by the cooking procedure. Though a recipe calls for a strict adherence to it with its imperatives, one is made to witness a set of deliberate transgressions of the expected, which well matches the textual boundaries transgressed by the genre. In spite of the time binding, the writer consciously posits a fluidity and flexibility in the narrative, through the seamless, meandering thoughts of the protagonist. The novel explores the theme of solitude from a de-politicised perspective. The creature cuttlefish, probably can be viewed as a clichéd animal trope. When it is subjected to death and prepared and groomed for consumption, it falls into the mould of the oppressed and the helpless. As Lucile Desblache points out, women are often linked to this animality owing to a parallel in their exclusion from and oppression within the patriarchal culture. Women, as Desblache points out, "is hindered in the expression of their difference" (89).

In contrast to the Anglo-Saxon and English feminist narratives which subvert archetypal structures and project more novel or newer patterns of femininity, read along the lines of the relationship of women with nature, the French feminists attempted to demolish the patriarchal images of women and were more overt and open in their expression of rage. In fact, French women writers segregate themselves into two categories in their handling and treatment of this "feminised nature" (90)- ones who comply to the traditional vision and those who rebel. Desbiolles being one of the most recent among the set of young French women writers, dissociates herself from this lineage of showcasing nature as a tool of oppression. "Nature in association with the feminine tends to reflect either the subversive ways in which women are excluded from social, sexual, and economic power, or the hidden, unrecognised sidesof a self which is still very much despised" (91). The anger is more self-directed rather than other-directed. The oppressed blames herself more than the oppressor.

They highlight the negative feminine models. They place forth the choice to enter into the realm of individual liberty, but at the cost of social agency.

Desbiolles' novel amplifies this basic disjunction that exists in French women's writing. She is neither a total compliant nor a vehement rebel of this vision. The protagonist of her narrative chooses to speak from a zone of self-imposed seclusion. She does not boisterously pounce onto or demand power. She is often helplessly wallowing in the quagmire of her own bitter past struggling to sail through and attain her true self. It is a conflicted femininity. The genuineness of the inner self is authenticated. The concern of the protagonist is more about finding a voice than about claiming power. As is with Scott's pattern of resistance, there are no organised attempts towards violent sabotages or politicised upheavals to break the mould of oppression. What is sought is a precious inner discovery. Desblaches reads in Desbiolles' narrative, an attempt to establish the fact that "there is no absolute truth to be understood or conquered; there are no external guidelines to be followed. She represents female characters excluded from material power. However, she suggests that the price to pay for this power, for being admired and rewarded by society, is the loss of another form of power, that of "inner creativity" (92). It is quite appealing in that regard to find no precedents to Desbiolles' protagonist/s. She chooses to merely float light, sans burdens.

When Desbiolles chooses a thoroughly non-exclusive, non-judgemental analogy of the protagonist with a sea mollusc, cuttlefish, what he highlights in that insignificance, is quite ironically, an element of beauty and ingenuity. Insignificance is significant, as it taps into the inner power and potential. It is a confused parallel that she draws between her protagonist and the cuttlefish in *The Cuttlefish: A Novel.* Even

when one visualises the mollusc as a creature which is usually dreaded and repulsive when alive, one is also persistently reminded of its choice in the diet- meant to be cooked and consumed. As we progress along with the stream of consciousness of the narrator, she takes us enroute her cooking of the creature, and associates herself with the dead and live versions of the same, alternating between the linkages to death and connections with the "unknown, unformed aspects of herself" (93). There is a subtle dialectics foregrounded by Desbiolles in and through the image of the cuttlefish- of strangeness and familiarity. The cloudy identity of the cuttlefish mirrors the undefined boundaries of the protagonist's identity. The murky taxonomy of the mollusc reflects the narrator's anonymous orientations and identity.

There is a "solitary silence" (94) that pervades the novel all through. From the moment in her reminiscence where she captures the image of the cuttlefish in distress in the Monaco Aquarium, till the point where it is stuffed and sauted for consumption, the narrator connects its "muted silence" (94) with her own incapacitated articulation. Her compiled reminiscences are little more than mere ramblings and remain largely shapeless like the cuttlefish. However, eventually, "it evolves away from the shapelessness of a powerless animal towards a creature defined by its tentacles" (96). Yet, there is a subtle ploy to resist, as she deliberately chooses to "obliterate past and future" (94). Rather than a "suppression of pain" (94), there is "a pleasant way of closing the door on reality" (94).

Laura Esquivel organises the plot of her novel *Like Water for Chocolate* in the format of a cookbook, presenting through a succession of twelve sections, a selection of twelve corresponding recipes, one for each month of the year, on a timeline of more than twenty years. She resists the pressure to succumb to a conventional plot

structure and chooses a loosely structured, fragmented one over it, with monthly morsels of enticing food. It is in her agenda to legitimise women's lived experiences in the domestic realm- the kitchen labour- by transforming it into the permanence of a literary form- a cookbook novel- through the marriage of food and narrative. The genre gives voice to women in the kitchen. It is a parody of a mid-nineteenth century genre, about which Valdes writes:

> Women's fiction published in monthly instalments together with recipes, home remedies…short poems, moral exhortations…and the calendar of church observances…These publications…are documents that conserve and transmit a Mexican female culture in which the social context and cultural space are particularly for women by women. (78)

Esquivel challenges the status quo. By foregrounding and fusing recipes- discourses which are marginal and feminine- into the canonical genre of a novel, and by breaching the expected norms of linearity associated with it, Esquivel establishes her iconoclasm. It becomes "a literal border narrative" (Sandoval 58) as it "crosses borders through its form, one that has traditionally been associated with women- the recipe book" (58). The novel becomes "culinary and narrative" (Glenn 41) at the same time. The culmination of each recipe coincides with the narrative anticipating a new crisis in each chapter that follows (Jaffe Hispanic 221).

The novel charts the daily life experiences of Josephita de la Garza (Tita), the youngest daughter of Mama Elena, on the family ranch. It is the de la Garza family saga as narrated by Tita's grand-niece, in the form of a cookbook. The novel is set inthe context of the Mexican Revolution of 1910. Against the backdrop of the violent and blood-tainted Revolution, Esquivel's conscious and deliberate foregrounding of

the feminine space of kitchen and the feminine acts of cooking and nursing becomes subversive and unconventional. Being placed at the historical juncture of Revolution which in history is marked off as a time with severe dearth of approved options and vistas for creativity, Esquivel transforms the peripheral feminine space of kitchen into Tita's creative alcove and celebrates the space and the acts, thereby accomplishing a "reclaiming of the kitchen as a space of creative power rather than merely confinement" (Jaffe Hispanic 220).

The novel displaces the male world of soldiery, violence and domination by pushing it to the fringes and sidelines and brings about a disruption in the status quo by replacing it with the traditionally feminine space of kitchen. Hierarchies are upset and power structures are dismantled. Kitchen becomes the locus of change and Tita, the cook, becomes the change-maker. Parallel to the Mexican Revolution in the background is another subtler and less visible resistance and revolt that takes place within the perimeters of the De la Garza ranch. This disguised resistance is an attack on the tyranny, racism and class consciousness that reek the ranch, which in itself is a microcosmic representation of Mexico at large. Eric Skipper quotes Cherie Meacham who observes that the Revolution foregrounds the conflicted relationship between Mama Elena and Tita, and Leah Chyne, who adds, that the "novel can be read as an allegorical examination of the Mexican Revolution, tracing the effects of the conflicting ideologies underlying the Revolution through the displacement onto the family structure" (185).

The epicentre of the novel's conflict is Mama Elena's proclamation of her decision to implement in the family the tradition of spinsterhood upon the youngest daughter. Tita being her youngest, on her sixteenth birthday, when Pedro comes to ask

her hand in marriage, he is vehemently denied the chance. Mama Elena lays down that Tita stays unmarried to take care of her until her death. She also destines Tita to the kitchen, making her triply marginalised- as a woman, as the youngest daughter with the traditional binding, and as the family cook relegated to the status of a servant and to always be in the kitchen- the rear space of insignificance, as is viewed to be. Mama Elena's antipathy is primarily ascribed to two factors- on the one hand is the patriarchal authority she adorns in all rigidity, being the sole and supreme authority of the ranch to fill the lacuna left by the sudden demise of her husband. On the other hand was the resentment and bitterness left behind by her own inability to resist the social structures that forbade her a life with her mulatto lover and subjected her to a 'proper' marriage. Destined to be by the hearth always and derided for even playing with her own sisters often, Tita decides to embrace the kitchen as her own kingdom and wage the war using her magical culinary skills. As Cherie Meacham writes, "Esquivel unites art, magic and domestic tradition in the series of small victories that Tita achieves over Mama Elena…Moreover, food preparation becomes the secret code through which Tita communicates her passion to Pedro and even incites others to rebel" (106). There is an uncanny amalgamation of the magical and the mundane in her cooking, which helps her transgress Mama Elena's repressive dictates.

By presenting the Revolution in the background, which, according to Carlos Fuentos was actually "a campesino and worker-led revolution to establish a radical state based on popular power" (Martinez 115) by challenging and resisting the thirty year old Porfiriato dictatorship as was supported by the provincial elites, Esquivel achieves the ease of mirroring the actual tempest and conflicted environment within the de la Garza ranch. The personal reflects the political at this juncture, as the ranch reflects the larger politics of the nation. The iron fist of Mama Elena relentlessly

gnaws at the self-respect of her youngest daughter to such a drastic extreme that she rebels and seeks refuge in her cooking; in the kitchen, because the warmth of this uterine space is unequalled by any other. Since her birth onto the kitchen table, Tita is nourished by this space. She therefore has a reciprocal trust invested in this space, and hence exercises her powers from here against the unjust and despotic rules of her mother. She is confident that her own culinary skills easily outwit her mother's. After the death of Nacha, "Tita was the best qualified of all women in the house to fill the vacant post in the kitchen, and in there flavours, smells, textures, and the effects they could have were beyond Mama Elena's iron command" (Esquivel 44). Every special event in the ranch household sees the meticulous and ritualistic banquet preparations by Tita, which also turn out to be opportune occasions for her to gain victory over her mother. The charm of her dishes destabilises the status quo. Mama Elena's rigour and order are disrupted.

The Mexican Revolution looming large in the background and shaping several events in the novel, is very well a time of crisis, conflict and dearth. Hunger and the hunt for nourishment are constant tropes of the Revolution, which is reflected in Tita too. If Mama Elena and Rosaura, the eldest daughter are brutal, domineering and oppressive like Porfirio Diaz, Tita reflects the revolutionary side. Her rebellion and resistance maybe at the domestic front, but are sure to achieve its desired effect. Mama Elena is heard asking her, "Are you starting up with your rebelliousness again? It's enough that you have the audacity to break the rules in your sewing" (11). Mama Elena is a product of the Porfiriato. The gendarme in her cannot ever be overruled. Esquivel writes, "In the de la Garza family some things could be excused, but not disobedience, not questioning parental authority" (115). The subtlest of defiance invokes Mama Elena's rancour towards the defiant- particularly Tita- who often

resorted to covert and disguised means of rebellion, enticingly clothed in delectable dishes, into which she would fuse her emotions to achieve her goal, much to the former's dislike. Her "ruptures" (Sutton *Bigger* 18) invite Mama Elena's scorn and derision. She has her panoptical eyes constantly surveilling her moves. Her senses are wired to detect disobedience, so much so that she even smells out the secret, clandestine meetings of Pedro and Tita in the ranch household, after the former's wedding with Rosaura. Tita is suspected to be suffering from a degree of matriphobia, "a womanly splitting of the self, in desire to become purged once and for all of our mothers' bondage, to become individuated and free" (Rich 236).

Tita's resistance is patterned into three phases. The first phase resistance is largely involuntary, when Tita, while in Mama Elena's womb, is unable to resist the luring smells from the kitchen. She refuses to stay inside any longer and opts for the warmer womb of the ranch hearth. She was born prematurely, onto the kitchen table, right into the midst of simmering soups and paradisiacal perfumes emanating from the stove. In the second phase, her resistance remains largely unspoken, concealed and disguised in the form of involuntary additives- her emotions- into the dishes she prepares. This phase offers her a clever and safe mode of resistance that "associates her sensual expression with the plenitude of her kitchen magic" (Meacham 105-106). Her anger, bitterness and longing- products of suppressed desires- spill into what she cooks. She, in fact, resists the culinary norm set by Mama Elena, through her own improvisations. This "risk" (Sutton *Bigger* 90) registers her defiance of traditions. Mama Elena's stoic regime is conservative and traditional, seeking stasis and symmetry, whereas Tita's is transgressive and reformative, seeking change and mobility. Mama Elena confides to the Vicar how her disgust towards concealed rebellion stands at a higher degree when compared to open rebellion. She says, "…nor

is the revolution as dangerous as you make out! It's worse to have chillies with no water around!" (Esquivel 74)

For Tita, cooking becomes a resourceful skill and a kind of weapon- a tool she deploys to fight oppression. The "digestive chaos" (Chaverri 139) that she causes with her dishes are her small and subtle acts of resistance. The events in the narrative speak of Tita's capacity to "radically alter" (Escaja 11) them- be it Rosaura's wedding which loses its grace owing to the chaotic vomiting spree sparked off by the wedding cake Tita makes, or the chickens flying in rage and fighting and pecking at each other, for the tortilla leftovers Tita feeds them in her rage, or the worms infesting the sausages she prepares in distress and despair, or Gertrudis' passion-driven escapade after eating off Tita's love-infused quail in rose petal sauce, or even the orgiastic-ridden banquet she prepares with lust at Esperanza's wedding. The cathartic outpour of her emotions change the semiotics of the dishes she prepares, and effects alterations in the outcome. Order is disrupted; hierarchies are dismantled; stereotypes are demolished.

Unlike the figures of infirm Mexican women, "*pegadas al metate*…(glued to the maize)" (Lem 152), impassive and meek, Tita gathers her strength and succour from the kitchen and wields power from within that space. She is like a lone chilli in walnut sauce, left on the plate at the end, with no one daring to eat it for fear of being viewed as a glutton. To go by Mark Muller's observation, chillies are often misconstrued to be monotonal in taste. It is not simply always "hot" (Kamp 310), buthas "shadings and variegations, like the weave of a textile, in terms of the ability to be expressive and be used as an aesthetic tool within the cuisine" (310-311). This is replicated in the novel's description of it as well. "[The stuffed pepper]…contains

every imaginable flavour; sweet as candied citron, juicy as a pomegranate, with the bit of pepper and subtlety of walnuts, that marvellous chilli in walnut sauce. Within it lies the secret of love" (Esquivel 54). Within Tita lies a rich and plentiful platter of flavours which she experiments with, in her cooking. Her emotional ingredients enrich and empower her in the act.

The traditionally constricted and relegated locus of the domestic kitchen offers power and control to Tita, who, through her sublime, magical cooking establishes herself as the centre and fulcrum of the ranch, subverting the hierarchies and controlling others' lives with her revolutionary culinary charms. Her culinary ventures are to be read as part of her attempts to establish herself and "to remain true to (herself) despite adversity" (Bettelheim 127). The confrontation between the affect-less Mama Elena and the affective Tita is often enacted in the latter's cooking. As Victoria Martinez quotes Sanchez Flavian's observation, Tita's "call to adventure" (117) takes her beyond and above a mere physical journey on a magical-real plane, setting a mystical rapport with food and the indigene cooks. With Nacha's death on Rosaura's wedding day, Tita, "the best qualified of all women in the house to fill the vacant post in the kitchen" (Esquivel 45) and "the last link in a chain of cooks who had been passing culinary secrets from generation to generation since ancient times" (45-46), "inherits" (Martinez 120) her post as the ranch cook. When alive, through her bodily proximity and apprenticeship, and after her death, through her spiritual guidance, Nacha helps Tita perform her culinary wonders. From her Tita learns to appreciate the local and the indigenous elements in cuisine, as against the bourgeoisieand feudal tastes of the class that she is actually born into. The difference stands glaring in the distinctive tastes of Tita and Rosaura:

> Rosaura and Nacha had never been close. Nacha was annoyed by Rosaura's picky eating, which had gone on since she was a child. She left her food untouched on her plate, or secretly fed it to Tequila, the father of Pulques, the ranch dog. Tita on the other hand had always been a good eater; she would eat anything. There was just one thing Tita didn't like: the soft-boiled eggs Mama Elena tried to make her eat. After Nacha had been put in charge of Tita's culinary education, she not only ate ordinary food, she also ate jumil bugs, maguey worms, crayfish, tepezcuintle pigs, armadillos, and other things that horrified Rosaura. (Esquivel 31)

Rosaura has an early aversion to the kitchen and Tita has a strong affinity to it since her birth, onto the kitchen table. Tita flourishes in the kitchen smells and Rosaura dies under the ill effects of food. What is appetising and appealing in Tita's eyes becomes appalling for Rosaura. Through Tita and her taste profile, Esquivel sets a pre-Hispanic culinary context in the novel. In her we find a perfect synthesis of ingredients and emotions, and she "juggled ingredients and quantities at will, obtaining phenomenal results..." (64).

Tita becomes a cook and a curandera who remedies physical and mental illnesses- both of her own and others. Through this, she also destabilises the Guadelupe-Malinche archetypes that rule Mexican culture. She positions "herself in a third space or border location in which she is neither one thing nor the other but something else- a "curandera", a hybrid archetype able to surpass binary oppositions and fixed identities" (Martinez-Ortiz 175). Marinez-Ortiz quotes Gloria Anzaldua when he surmises that:

> The curandera archetype is a combination of Guadalupe and Malinche that deconstructs the opposition Madonna-whore by seizing a neutral location from where this New Mestiza is able to build her own alternate story. Because of her polysemic nature, "La curandera" is a healer venerated and deeply respected in the community, yet she is feared because she has dominion over the spiritual world and possesses supernatural powers like a witch. (175)

Tita performs her cures from the kitchen, drawing her strength and power from the guidance offered by the spirit of the indigenous ranch cook Nacha, while in the ranch, and experiences the Kikapoo grandmother of Dr John Brown while at his place, recuperating from her misshapen nose and broken mind- aftermath of her daring and third phase of resistance, a gesture of open defiance and rebellion against her mother on hearing the death of her nephew Roberto. When her mother forbids tears or any show of grief, Tita tears apart the sausages she was preparing, shouts at her and openly declares her frustration at Mama Elena's rule. When she gets spanked by the wooden ladle, she shows her anger, climbs up the pigeon cote with her bleeding nose, and chooses to lie there amidst the filth and feathers of the birds, unclothed, and in a foetal posture. Away from the ranch and Mama Elena's tyranny, Tita is confused about her own essence and the use of her hands, while at Dr Brown's house, till the latter ignites her inner power and urges her to regain her lost sense of self. She is awakened to the possibilities of a life without repression. Post her return to the ranch and the death of Mama Elena, when she continues to be traumatised and tormented by her dead mother's spirit, she gathers courage to exorcise and forbid the spirit from terrifying and reprimanding her. She is heard to shout, "I know who I am! A person who has a perfect right to live her life as she pleases. Once and for all, leave me alone; I won't put up with you! I hate you, I've always hated you!" (180).

Emotions are anathema for Mama Elena, who aligns with patriarchal power delineations. She forbids tears and any other display of affect, considering them all to be signs of weakness. When Tita sits sad and forlorn at the loss of her lover Pedro to her sister Rosaura, Mama Elena tells her, "I won't stand disobedience, nor am I going to allow you to ruin your sister's wedding, with your acting like a victim. You're in charge of all the preparations starting now, and don't ever let me catch you with a single tear or even a long face, do you hear?" (28). Further in the novel when Chencha comes in tears to announce the death of Roberto, she tells her "Don't cry, my child. It annoys me to see you cry" (89) and issues an immediate order, "Sit down and get back to work. I don't want any tears" (89). Nacha, on the other hand, believes in and respects emotions. She allows Tita's unrestricted expressions of emotions. At the wake of Rosaura's wedding, when a battered and beaten Tita prepares the cake batter, she weeps uncontrollably with Nacha by her side, who tells her, "Now we're alone in the kitchen, go ahead and cry, my child, because I don't want them to see you crying tomorrow" (30). Tita survives her subjugation by infusing her emotions into her culinary creations. She designs her dishes according to her discretion, causing them to be sometimes nurturing and at other times damaging. To go by Behar's observation, Tita resembles the Mexican women in the eighteenth century who used to ensorcel their husbands' food and "made men 'eat' their witchcraft, using their power over the domain of food preparation for subversive ends" (180). Tita's emotions "transubstantiate the food" (Counihan Food, Feelings and Film 207) from simple comestibles into powerful agents which can bring about change and autonomy.

Tita embraces the spirit of revolution, resists many of the oppressive stereotypes and conventions, transgresses several traditions and accomplishes liberation- for herself and for the ones who trust her cuisines. She accommodates her erotic pleasures

into her culinary acts and seeks satiation through the same. Gertrudis ingests all the passion and lust that is blown into the quail in rose petal sauce which Tita prepares, and becomes the latter's "sexual subconscious" (Escaja 16) when she runs away from the ranch to liberation. While Tita accomplishes "her own revolution in the family environment" (Lowenstein and Esquivel 594) becoming a complete "transgressor" (596), Gertrudis "goes out and becomes a part of the Revolution. She becomes a general, she participates in the public phase of the Revolution, she kills people" (594). Gertrudis leaves the domestic domain to acquire power whereas Tita remains within the kitchen and enamours herself through her everyday resistances.

When the kitchen becomes the new centre, displaced from the fringe to the fulcrum position, there are accompanying alterations affecting lives. Boundaries blur, entailing transgressions and transformations. Tita's recipes alter the events and open up possibilities. She facilitates life and liberty in her niece Esperanza too. She insists that she be named Esperanza (meaning Hope) and rescues her from her mother Rosaura's imbecility to put her in a similar fate as Tita's. True it is that:

> Several coincidences suggested that this child's fate would be similar to Tita's…out of sheer necessity she spent the greatest part of the day in the kitchen, since her mother couldn't take care of her and her aunt could only take care of her in the kitchen, and with the gruels and teas she was growing healthier among the tastes and smells of this warm, paradisical place. (Esquivel 135)

Yet upon hearing young Alex, Dr John Brown's son, express his desire to marry her when she grows up, Rosaura tells him that "he couldn't because this little girl was destined to take care of her until the day she died" (137), Tita feels herself boiling

literally “like water for hot chocolate” (138). Tita is enraged at Rosaura for having “thought to perpetrate such an inhuman tradition” (137) and wishes that her words never leak out of her, “those foul, filthy, frightful, repulsive, revolting, unreasonable words. Better to have swallowed them and kept them deep in her bowels until they were putrid and worm-eaten” (137). And just as she wishes, Rosaura dies of flatulence and indigestion quite soon.

From playing with boys in her childhood, eating indigenous foods, swimming in the Rio Grande, bringing the horses to a halt single-handedly, forgetting to baste before stitching, calling her mother *Mama* instead of *Mami,* feigning a headache to avoid her sister’s wedding, altering the recipes, questioning the Carreno etiquette manual, openly daring to disobey her mother and blaming her for Roberto’s death, there are big and small defiances and subversions built into the narrative. Esquivel redefines the feminine and its associated values and virtues, critiques patriarchy and its hierarchical power structures, transgresses binaries of race and class, and celebrates sexuality and subjectivity- all through the power of food. As Jacqeline Zeff rightly observes of Latina writers, “Food- its preparation, consumption , sensuality, and power- carries more than memory of home; food is not only the message but the medium of love, the spirit, survival, even art itself” (94). Through her culinary magic Tita incites others too to rebel. By causing the rupture of hierarchies and archetypes through food, Tita allows the novel to be embedded with carnivalesque dynamics. Amalia Chaverri underscores the elements of gastronomic excesses, the erotic, transgressions and the entailing empowerment as signs of the “carnivalesque” (140).

Food is not merely an add-on or an adornment in McHenry’s narrative. It becomes the pivotal pole that unifies all the loose strands and makes a palatable,

wholesome meal possible. Food replaces dissonance with an agreeable assonance. As the protagonist Ginny's refrain goes, "The calm is in the rhythm" (McHenry 49) of a recipe; in the rhythm of cooking. For Ginny Selvaggio of *The Kitchen Daughter: A Novel*, the impact of a double-dosed tragedy is alleviated by the kitchen. For Ginny, an over-sheltered girl of twenty-six, loss of both her parents in an accident would have proved to be a fatal blow, as her life as an Aspergian was all too dependent on them. Left with just her younger sister Amanda and her family, Ginny struggles to cope with the loss and the change that ensues. After the heaviness of the loss subsides a little, the more severe blow that strikes Ginny however, is her sister's decision to sell the house that they had been living in so long, and still is. For Ginny, the news of her parents' death, their funeral, the crowd which gathers up to attend the ceremony- all appear so unreal and undesirable. What is normal for her is an ordinary day with her laptop on, reading Kitcherati up in her attic room on the third floor. But now, with the turn of events and the unforeseen tragedy, she is suddenly caught amidst the remarks of many- all studded with words like spoilt, awful, strange, weird and a whole spectrum of its synonyms. A touch was a trauma for her.

Cooking becomes a mode of resistance for Ginny; a means to escape from reality. When the bulk of people's bodies and sharpness of their gazes become unbearable for her, Ginny seeks means to evade by constructing images of food from memory or imagination, within her mind. She concentrates intensely on the textures, smells and flavours of those foods, to spare herself from the trauma of the present. It is her method of saving herself from the 'expected' and 'normal' display of emotions. Even the acknowledgement of the reality of her parents' death is kept at bay by this mechanism.

The only way of escapade for Ginny from such traumatic situations is to lose herself in food. Her thoughts of food are rarely of repasts, but always of cooking food- “Its flavor and shape, or the different ways you can use it, or the process of cooking something” (177), as she shares with Dr. Stewart at her clinic. Sometimes the rich, wet texture of melting chocolate, sometimes the bulk of bread-dough, sometimes the silky feel of pasta dough, scent of caramelized onions, “How heat transforms. How they go from white and raw and crunchy to soft and melting and sweet” (177). She tries to experience the magical transformations of food in her imagination. Kitchen becomes her space of security, and the warmth of the stove gives her the maturing warmth of a mother’s love. Kitchen allows her to breathe freely and experience the safety of her home. She dives into a recipe and usually lets it absorb her. She lets the instruction take her over, “step by step by step until the hum begins to fade to silence” (6). The most relaxing sound for Ginny is the rhythm of the knife slicking quietly against the cutting board. However, Ginny’s grief cooking is oriented inwards, and fails to qualify as normal. She encounters the question, “Ginny, what are you doing? Are you cooking something, what for? Are you okay?” (9), which disrupts her rhythm and pattern and damages her comfort and solace.

The magic in the kitchen is an intense experience for Ginny. It extends beyond the mere transformation of raw ingredients into a palatable dish. When she cooks from a handwritten recipe by a person, she starts seeing that person come alive in her very own kitchen. Among the first in the line of the dead who Ginny meets through her cooking, is her own grandmother, Nonna. She cooks her Ribollita and invokes her when the house is packed with mourners who have come over to console the daughters upon the loss of their parents. Cooking is not ‘normal’ in a house of mourning, but for Ginny cooking is the only solace and act that can reinstate her

normalcy and help her reassure herself. The quirky encounter with Nonna prods her to try more dishes by different people, adhering to the mandate of following handwritten recipes by each. Each episode plays the role of a puzzle-piece, leading her into unknown knowledge of her family- particularly her father- and thereby herself. She attempts to rescript her life and self, by decrypting the past. This is in a way, a kind of resistance cooking, as she does it because of her unwillingness to let go and move on. She resists the present to stay in the past. She is heard to say, "I can't believe that they're gone. Maybe this means I am in denial" (37). Her inability to deal with the grief of the present- the tragedy of her parents' death- is evidenced by her reluctance to move out of the house. She refuses to throw away the leftover groceries in the kitchen, or to discard her parents' belongings. She reclaims everything that Amanda, her sister, packs as trash. She tells Amanda when the latter speaks of her plan to put up the house for sale, "It's not sitting here empty. I'm living in it" (18). Her words echo the fact that she is 'invisible' to Amanda; rather Amanda has failed in 'knowing' Ginny, so much so that the former is oblivious of Ginny's desires and sentiments. She reminds Amanda, "It's not fair to assume I can't do something just because I haven't" (19). Ginny resists being "institutionalized" (19) or being "screened" (20) to diagnose any "problem" (20) in her.

Ginny 'classifies' the skin texture of every touch that falls on her body- oven-hot skin, fish-flesh skin, chicken-liver skin- all based and defined in terms of her culinary experiences. Even the voices of people she encounters, are 'classified'- orange-juice like, regular spearmint bubblegum like, and many more. Her life and everyday acts are all defined in culinary terms so much so that a hot water bath makes her feel like an ingredient- sometimes an egg, or a noodle, or a lobster. Hence, she prefers a shower. She owns the confidence that within a kitchen, every ingredient,

when handled correctly is sure to change in predictable and expected ways. Though her mother has told her often that one cannot get honey from an onion, she overrules this dictum by her belief that one can, sometimes. The magic of cooking lies in the hands of the cook. Ginny believes in the magic of food and the transformations that food can effect.

Ginny acknowledges that she is socially awkward but refuses to be addressed as abnormal or retarded. She claims to have a "personality" (153) which is unique. She says, "I'll stick with iconoclasm" (156). She refers to two things which can soothe her in arduous times, at several occasions in the novel- cooking and Normal Book. Each offers her solace in its own way. When the latter, a book that has newspaper cutouts, printouts where the word normal figures, renders her a strong affirmation of her own self, and attributes her the sense of normal, the former offers her room for retrospection and a comforting distraction; an escapade. Ginny has to repeat the refrain "Normal doesn't just mean what you want it to mean" (20) every time she is caught in a demeaning situation which tries to typecast her based on her disability. She seeks a more accommodative definition of 'normal'. Gert, the Cuban Jewish maid who comes over to clean, seems to be the only one person other than her dead parents who does it the right way; deals with her the way she is comfortable. Ginny speaks of Gert, "She approaches me the only way I can stand, straight on, in plain sight" (15). The taste of her coconut turnovers/ Cuban pastries brings with it the ease and comfort of familiarity and security into Ginny. She offers Ginny the recipe for the same and advices not to let the grief of her parents' death, drown her. She says, "It is always good to bring something new into our lives. This is an old thing to me, but I thought it could be a new thing to you" (94).

Ginny's resistance too, like Tita's, can be structured out into three phases, when placed on a temporal plane- before her parents' death, at their death and after their death. Since the age of eight, Ginny has had several obsessions. For a while, it was ESP which gave way to round things. It then went on to Turkish rug patterns, and finally came to food. So compulsive is her obsession that she cannot understand Amanda's fuss over the need to tidy up the kitchen, throwing off the remaining food stored there, after their parents' death. Ginny cannot bring herself to giving up her objects of obsession. She stealthily reclaims all that Amanda throws off as garbage, back into the kitchen. Kitchen in fact was one space that Ginny's mother allowed her to enter, perform, and experiment, while she had only prohibitions encircling her otherwise, outside of kitchen. This liberty that is granted to her and which she is accustomed to, is what probably makes her arrogantly possessive of the kitchen and its belongings.

However, cooking was her coping mechanism to survive the suffocation induced by rules and restrictions otherwise. She says:

> Ma never let me drink alcohol, along with the other things she never let me do; go on dates, get a job, move out, travel to other cities alone. It was part of the deal we made years ago. I could cook whenever and whatever I wanted, and she would buy me all the ingredients and utensils and pots and knives I asked for, and set aside half the shelves for my cookbooks. In return I would follow her rules. (28)

She adds later in the narrative, "Like Ma…always repeating rules and being protective. I felt smothered sometimes" (80). Though not to the level of a tyrant like

Mama Elena and her rules in *Like Water for Chocolate,* Ginny's mother too imposes rules on her daughter, more as a gesture of care and out of her concern towards her. Ginny cooks to resist this incapacitated status of hers; to prove and affirm herself.

In the realm of cooking, Ginny refuses to place any restrictions/boundaries. She learns from her own experiences, internet, and cookbooks. When her obstinacy overrules everything and everyone, she imagines herself to be like a sugar cube that refuses to dissolve in cold water, or like sesame oil which "stays where you put it" (166). When panic seizes, she struggles to be this sugar cube. She desires the comfort of cooking, to calm herself down. Ginny recognises the power in food. She becomes a link in the chain of womanhood shared through cooking, by her grandmother Nonna, and her mother. She expresses her confidence in cooking food. "And although it cannot save me, it might help me, in some way. All I have besides food is grief. I close the glass doors over the cookbook, protecting them from the heat and grease of kitchen air" (42). It is in the kitchen and in several of the recipe manuscripts and cookbooks that Ginny seeks answers to complete the puzzle about herself and her family and their associations with others.

Ginny's deftness and skill in cooking rules out the requirement of any recipe aid. Though she often falters in reading people's faces, reading their expressions and feelings, their body language and the like, she seldom falters with food. Her cuisines become cryptic and uncanny in a sense, as she decodes their capacity to invoke the spirits of the dead persons when she cooks from their recipes. She conjures up several of her family members and their acquaintances- Nonna, her grandmother, through her Ribollita, Mrs John Hammersmith (Necie), through Georgia Peach, Evangeline Matamoros, through Midnight Cry Brownies, her own dad, through homemade play-

doh, David's wife Elena, through Aji de Gullina and David (Gert's son) himself, through his recipe for Hot Chocolate drink. And through all of them she conjures up memories. Ginny establishes a connection between food and family. She seeks to decode her own past, and her family's past, through cooking. For Ginny, where verbal communication and a tete-a-tete is nearly a nightmarish thing, food becomes the most comfortable channel and medium to communicate, mostly with apparitions having no flesh and bones, thereby sparing herself the trauma of touch.

In this second phase of cooking which she does during her bereavement period and which largely emerges as cryptic and uncanny, with magical invocations of ghosts, what Ginny resists is the tortuous reality of the present; of death and loss. Though first fortuitously and later intentionally, these invocations ironically bring the dead briefly back to life, quite against the usual dictum that she is particular about in her cooking- that all the ingredients ought to be dead (she cannot handle the idea of consuming yoghurt as it makes her feel sick to think of yeast as a live creature). She says:

> My family is dead, but I can bring them back, at least for a short time through their recipes. I tell myself that power would confuse anyone. I don't know why I have it, but I do. Something about the way I cook their recipes calls to them. I tell myself it doesn't mean I'm crazy, or not normal, or that I have a syndrome. I'm flawed. I never said I wasn't. (168)

It is evident that cooking offers possibilities for Ginny. When every other aspect in life restricts and controls, food becomes a liberating element. The more complicated the life situation she is caught in, the more complex/elaborate a meal Ginny imagines cooking, to get over the situation. The dreadful moment of Evangeline's appearance

in the kitchen fills her with anxiety that she, with the intention of taking her own mind off the Brownie which brought Evangeline's spirit in, says that she "thinks of other food, other meals- the most complicated menu planning" (52) that she can think of- her true, desperate resort. She adds, "The imaginary dinner party I've always wanted to know, the seven-course…sweet Gorgonzola Dolce…" (52-53). When she re-emerges a survivor from the crisis, she feels like yeast that can live through being frozen. However, it is not a mere survival that Ginny needs. What is sought is not simply affirmation but an independence and transformation; a change. Resisting the present only stultifies her growth. She continues her attempts to grapple with grief, but helplessly remains at the same point, within her past, within her kitchen.

The real propeller of change in the novel is Gert, who initiates Ginny into the final phase of her resistance where real transformation sets in her. Gert invites her to *Chevra kadisha,* the Jewish temple burial society (148), because, as she explains to Ginny, "You and I, we both know much grief. But is life. When grief comes it is good that people have each other…And now let us put our own grief away. We are here" (146). She reminds Ginny, "you cannot stay in the house…You should live in it. But you shouldn't stay there all the time. You can do more" (151). At the *Chevra kadisha* where she participates in the *seudat havra'ah,* Ginny learns to think beyond herself. It helps her to realise that her grief is not the only one that matters. She tells herself:

> Looking at them reminds me of my own grief, my own sadness. I would have liked a meal of consolation. I suppose that is what I was trying to do when I accidentally invoked Nonna's ghost. Reaching into the past to cook the ribollita, something from a happier time. But the result wasn't at all consoling. Maybe

> that's why you're not supposed to cook your own. Maybe you're grieving too hard. (150)

Ginny's cooking is a therapy she conducts on herself. Each dish she puts together is her attempt to cope with life, to seek company, to understand relationships and emotions, to move on in life, transforming as she traverses. She thinks:

> Dad had the syndrome and he found a way to succeed anyway. He found something he was good at and he used it. Maybe I could do the same. Cooking, I'm good at it, maybe I could use that to connect with the world instead of hiding away…I got hidden away and now it's harder to break out. I think I can. I don't think it's too late…I have to live it…the word *normal* is inclusive. Maybe I can live in the world, and be who I want to be, after all. (194-196)

By the end of the novel, the last of all the ghosts to appear in Ginny's kitchen, shockingly, is David himself. Frustrated over Ginny's failure to bring his wife's ghost to the kitchen through cooking her Peruvian dish Aji de Gullina, David had stormed out of Ginny's house after a bash of violence and destruction. He later meets with an accident and dies on the road. Not knowing this, Ginny prepares a solacing hot chocolate following his recipe, only to discover his ghost in there. She later joins to prepare the meal of consolation for Gert, the grieving mother. Ginny learns by now to take a new approach to death, that what is important about death is not the dead, but the living- the ones who are left behind. She tells herself, "All those meals Gert made for others in grief. The oblong foods, the separation of meat and milk, the casseroles for the freezer. Kugel and soup and muffins and cakes. All lovingly prepared. Now, she is the one grieving. Hers is the family that needs consolation" (260).

Ginny is transformed. She has learnt to empathise. She says, “Gert’s grief, was all I could think of while she was here. If you don’t know how to deal with emotion, other people’s feelings can hit you like a drug” (258). The act of David scribbling on her cookbook, which she earlier would have considered impolite, is tolerated and pardoned. It only brings forth a smile from her who is now willing to treat it as a form of conversation. Ginny learns to remember and let go of dead people rather than be obsessed with them- especially her parents. She has learnt the art of moving on. She becomes like:

> Tres leches cake. A white cake waiting in a white porcelain baking dish. Cream pouring down, not a drizzle, but a thick, steady, heavy stream. Soaking into the dry sponge of the cake. Being drunk up heavily. Seeming to disappear, but changing everything. Texture. Taste. The cake can’t stay the way it is.
>
> Without all three milks it’s too dry. It has to change. (206)

She is heard to say, “I couldn’t just hide out in the kitchen with the ghosts forever. I would have had to neglect the living to do it. And the living, all of us, are more important than the dead” (270). Ginny finally has learnt to practice making her brow smooth and her body language open (271). She says at the end of the novel, “I want them to bite into a cookie, and think of me, and smile. Food is love. Food has a power. I knew it in my mind, but now I know it in my heart” (272). She learns that the living need nurturance more than the dead, and she willingly starts offering it. When magic meets the mundane, Ginny achieves transformation. A vehement repulsion towards touch, straight gazes and affect, thaw into an expanded self that accommodates it all to the level of empathy. Cooking helps her carve out a space of her own; a niche for her own unique self, and yet reach out to others and understand

them. Moving out of her own kitchen into others' kitchens helps her move and think beyond herself and embrace and accommodate others too in her life.

In Marsha Mehran's novel *Pomegranate Soup*, the arrival of Aminpour Sisters in Ballinacroagh, the sleepy Irish village shadowed by the monkish solemnity of Croagh Patrick or The Reek upon which St Patrick is believed to have nestled for forty days and forty nights is the end of a seven-year long exodus from their home country Iran. The cordiality and shelter offered by Mrs Delmenico, the widow of Luigi Delmenico of Papa's Pastries, the Italian pastry shop however is not extended by the rest of the village which shudders under the power and control of the liquor baron of the place, Mr. Thomas McGuire. Nothing deters Marjan, the eldest of the sisters, who enters Ballinacroagh "determined to keep up the momentum that had carried them from London, over the Irish Sea and into this land of crazed sheep and dizzying roads" (Mehran 21). This spirit of resilience is the result of the trauma they bore through back home. The task that the Sisters have in hand in Ballinacroagh is arduous because it does not simply involve removing the petrified mould of the dough and flour from the walls and counters of Papa's Pastries, and transforming it into their "Eastern-flavoured oasis" (23) but also to dismantle the barricade of xenophobia that pervaded the whole village. The novel becomes the struggle of the Sisters to break through the skeptic gaze of the Ballinacroaghans at the former's "spicy, sinful intonations" (3) which they believed, "reeked of an unknown evil; a godforsaken foreignness that set off alarm bells" (3-4). Marjan and her sisters have the big onus of appeasing all the hungry souls in the village; hungers of varied sorts- of lust, forgossip, for recognition, to accomplish dreams- and to satisfy each one becomes a challenging task for them.

Drowsed by the gaelic sea breeze, the placidity of Ballinacroagh offers the image of a safe and secure haven when viewed from outside. However, this treacherous serenity is only a façade which quickly unravels a stoic rejection of everything foreign. The village is a rigid bastion that spews disgust and repugnance at cultural otherness of all forms. The place's obstinacy is replicated in its worst form in the character of Dervla Quigley, the best possible aide to Mr Thomas McGuire:

> From her bedroom window, in a flat above The Red Relics shop, Dervla Quigley could see the universe. Or its equivalent, which for her were the comings and goings of all who ventured up and down Main Mall…At most times of the day- except during 6 O'clock mass- Dervla could be found spying out of her bedroom window…It was an admirable feat of endurance, this constant watch over all Ballinacroagh, especially considering the old gossip's unfortunate medical condition. (35)

The panoptic surveillance of Dervla Quigley is probably one of the vilest Ballinacroaghan strategies employed to arrest the entry of foreign elements and people. Her unceasing gaze, embedded with a shockingly amazing controlling power, ensures stasis. She operates like a "self-burdened guardian of social order and a functionary of moral discipline. Her contempt for anything and anyone foreign is evident in the way she detests the frequent hippie visitors to Ballinacroagh – the Tinkers – not once bothering to learn the tumultuous history of Ireland's travelling people" (37). She says, "Dirty, disgusting things, those tinkers…If she wasn't around to look after things, just imagine what sort of scum would come cruising down her beloved Main Mall!" (38).

In the novel, Marjan and her sisters gear up with their cooking to defy the resistance of Ballinacroagh. For the Sisters, food and recipes act as interstices between their homeland and host land, a concept propounded by Homi K Bhaba in his work *The Location of Culture.* The long vexatious escapade from Iran, their homeland, was a runaway from blaring horns and sirens, military jeeps signaling night curfews, chadors, Islamic vigilantes, the rants of the revolutionaries "*Death to the traitor Shah! Death to all things from the opiate West!"* (Mehran 105). The Revolution was not merely a phase of collective political trauma, but too deeply personal a trauma as well for the Aminpour Sisters. For Marjan, this trauma stemmed from experiences at the Gohid Detention Centre, where she was tortured and interrogated and her world broke open, "bursting and bleeding like the rich yolk of quail eggs cracked over a hot skillet" (171), and for Bahar it was in the "ochre and yellow assembly of bruises, imprints of contorted fingers, a violet of burst veins, a torn earlobe, thighs embossed with thick baton grooves- things that left in her unseen wounds all through" (John 90), by the "ill-fated marriage to Hossein Jaferi, Khanoum Jaferi's sadistic son" (John 90).

Safety within the craggy folds of the new Irish village is all that mattered to Marjan. For her, "as long as they were able to survive, to plod along in this sleepy town, she didn't care much about its size, its prejudices. So long as no one on the outside world, beyond the craggy boundaries of the Western village, knew that they were there. That was all that mattered" (200). Ballinacroaghans view their Babylon Café as "Sinful!" (117), "Unhygienic…Down right dirty. Babylon Café! Sinful, that's what it is!" (140), as Dervla Quigley is heard to describe it to all the parishioners, and the brown-toned Sisters as embodiments of "John's warning in Revelations" (213) - the Harlots of Babylon. The challenge for the Sisters therefore is to resist these

deprecatory remarks and to transform the place into their "paradise" (241) and into a miraculous garden of Babylon.

Definitely, "labelling something as resistance may give legitimacy to otherwise marginal work" (Hollander and Einwohner 551). In *Pomegranate Soup,* the Aminpour Sisters do not resort to violent attempts or force of any form to settle down in their new locale. The very ordinary acts of cooking help them strategise their stay and reinstate their lost peace back into their lives. Most Ballinacroaghans characterized in the novel are reeling in hunger; a dearth. Yet the paradox is that, they shut themselves in and stay hostile to possibilities, chances and changes. Marjan and her sisters bring with them the exoticism and flavours of cuisines from their homeland. Though difficult initially to wade through the hostile waters of Ballinacroagh, their richly laden platters become the oars to ferry them across into their warm embrace. The subtle resistance enacted through cooking and offering delectable dishes from the East, help them avert succumbing to the disgust and disregard of Ballinacroagh. What was lost enroute their exodus from the clutches of radical religious factions in their homeland, is reclaimed here using their culinary expertise.

The sojourn of the Aminpour Sisters to liberation passes through several phases. The hazardous walk through the sandy desert terrains of Iran, the refugee recluse in London and finally encountering the cynical scrutiny of Ballinacroagh, Ireland. Spaced out into these three phases, the resistance patterns they employ, also vary. The first phase is of their exodus from Iran:

> The night they left Tehran forever was a September night like no other…Only three days had passed since the students, marching peacefully against the Shah's regime, had been greeted by indiscriminate military bullets. Thousands had met

> their immediate death…blood, still seeping, still weeing its way along their leafy boulevard. The bloody handprints, were splattered all over the dirty pavement, bright and fresh…the blood dripping from the bases of palms like new sets of fingers. The red rivulets seeped into the pavement cracks, greeting their compatriots on the ground with a shake, a wave of defiance that acknowledged the mutual source of their misery. (145-146)

What affected the Sisters beyond all of these however, and certainly more personally, is the aftermath of certain strange encroachments and disruptions in the form of false saviors, while destitute in their lives. Marjan's bonds with Ali, and through him, her association with the revolutionary students at the university, with the underground newspaper *The Voice,* the uncomfortable radicalism that she unknowingly allowed herself into and the tortuous custodial interrogation by the Shah police at the Gohid Detention Centre worsened the situation at the familial front where, in Marjan's absence, her two sisters- sixteen year old Bahar and seven year old Layla- quite vulnerable by their age, was falsely lured by the Women's Party, a local organization led by Khanoum Jaferi. The vicious arms of the female fundamentalists had already fattened up the bodies and minds of the naïve sisters with ideas of militant revolution and images of the "turbaned idol" (216) and had neatly wrapped them within chadors. With "pots of rice and split pea soup" (218) Khanoum Jaferi, the "militant matron"(218) set her hold over the young girls and soon followed "reactionary chadors proliferating in their kitchen" (219). Bahar paid more than what Marjan did for her faltered step, with her "unquestioning loyalty" (219) for Khanoum Jaferi's only son, the man who was going to be her husband" (219). Like Tita who was bound to prepare the wedding cake for her sister Rosaura's wedding, the onus of Bahar's wedding banquet fell on Marjan. Delicacies like "the baklava, the mulberry-almond

paste, and the walnut, chickpea and the rice cookies" (221) were crafted and created by Marjan's deft hands. Memories of it flood Marjan's frame:

> As she rolled out the pastry for the baklava (enough to feed the entire militant party of two hundred), Marjan tried to reason with her gnawing stomach, with that voice that was telling her to take her two sisters and run. This Hossein and all that came with him- the Molotov cocktail parties he organized, the martyred uncle he worshipped, his domineering mother who seemed to have Bahar under an unbreakable spell- were wrong. All wrong. And there was nothing Marjan could do to alter her sister's fate. (221)

Her sister who returns after weeks has only the "blotchy and jaundiced" (147) skin on the wounds on her ear, "matching the purple and yellow stains on Bahar's forehead and cheeks" (147) to show Marjan. A deeply bruised and wounded psyche and physique induces an overdose of fear into Bahar which paralyses her ever since. Marjan takes charge of her and treats her paranoia with her food, that the former achieves her healing at the end of the narrative, when she is completely rid of her delusions. The involvement of Marjan and to some extend Bahar, in the political protests and defiant activities, is their overt sign of resistance. It becomes part of a larger political revolutionary agenda. However, with the political becoming ruinous to the personal, they are forced to flee. This exodus itself becomes another form of their resistance when they chose to avert and evade an oppressive dictatorial regime of religious orthodoxy and patriarchal hegemony. Hussein's attempt to assault Bahar, is thwarted by Marjan and Bahar who beat him down and leave their home for good. In this second phase of their resistance, the female trio journey towards freedom, overcoming travails enroute, with the absence of a male aide or counterpart. This in

itself becomes a subversion of a prevalent patriarchal myth that involves a charming savior prince who facilitates a liberation of his beautiful damsel in distress.

Once in Ballinacroagh, breaking the xenophobic obstinacy and the monastic celibacy of the place becomes the next challenge for them. Their resistance here is manifested in the form of cooking. Instead of walking away in dejection, they embrace the place within their folds by pleasing the palates of Ballinacroaghans. A people whose daily diet rarely went beyond potatoes and stale toasts, suddenly encounter variety in flavours and aromas. Marjan and her sisters disrupt their monotony and upset the homogeneity of the locale's tastes. In this final phase of resistance, the Aminpour Sisters create an in-between space, between enculturation and acculturation. They inhale foreignness but without allowing it to damage the fabric of their own cultural essence. They bring transformation to Ballinacroagh. Like Vianne of *Chocolat* who transforms an unused bakery into the luring chocolaterie La Celeste Praline, the Sisters transform the locked up Delmenico pastry shop into Babylon Café. If Francais Reynaud, the local priest is the one who suspects danger and becomes the most vehement opposition to Vianne's entry and establishment in Joanne Harris' novel *Chocolat*, it is Father Mahoney, the local priest who, in contrast to the former, becomes the first to enamour himself with the tastes of Babylon Café:

> Not until the moment he first tasted Marjan's *abgusht* had Father Mahoney allowed himself once again to entertain his comedic ambitions…Hastily finishing his lunch one afternoon, the priest rushed home to the parish and pulled out his old electric typewriter and began writing…When Father Mahoney finally stopped writing a week later, he had before him a two-act play dedicated to the pleasures of the mind and body. (186-187)

The effervescence of the change induced by Marjan's dishes becomes contagious. It spills over into other Ballinacroaghans. Fiona Athey, a former actor and currently a saloon owner, gets the urge to go back to her desires and chase her dreams in theatre and decides to direct Father Mahoney's play. This spreading positivity makes Marjan feel lighter and exuberant, like "the airy, white mass" (188) of *lavash* dough that feels "almost weightless in her hands… Perhaps she too was like the *lavash* bread, thought Marjan: given some time and a warm, comforting environment, anything was possible" (188).

Thanks to Marjan's food and the Babylon Café, even the lonely widow Estelle feels invited "to the camaraderie and community she had longed for over four decades" (203). Layla and her youthful and promising fragrance throws even the "reluctant baker" (210), Benny Corcoran into a re-examination of his own choices in life. Benny, whose "once athletic body" (211) has turned into "a pitiful lump of fat and freckles" (211) and the "glorious head of red hair" (211) into "a handful of unruly strands" (211) suddenly installs "a pull up bar over the bakery's back door (211), experiments with comb-overs and hair volumisers" (211), digs out his "wide-lapelled leather jacket" (211) and his "Gaelic football trophies" (211) to win back what he had lost to the past and forgotten. Layla's natural cinnamon-rose fragrance breaks the stoic façade maintained by Tom Junior, the eldest son of Thomas McGuire. Tom who had been closely following and keeping a vigilant watch over his brother Malachy and Layla, upon his father's behest, simply starts moaning and weeping "with confused sadness" (255) when he comes in close proximity to Layla, only to realize later that the real reason for his tears was a longing for freedom, something that "his hungry heart" (259) had been yearning for long. She smelt Layla and she "had shown him

what he could do, what he could be without the shadow of his father always looming over him" (256).

In Ballinacroagh, a McGuire den where even the mere thoughts of an alternative to Thomas McGuire's pub is a sacrilege and sin, the very act of stepping into Babylon Café itself is treated as defiance. However, what still helps the Café flourish in Ballinacroagh is the magical taste and fragrance of Marjan's delicacies, offering a phenomenal "combination of bodily satisfaction and the independence of the soul" (243) which "is hard to beat" (243). Induced by the charm of Marjan's dishes, Ballinacroaghans wake up from their stupor of passivity, and languor caused by years of "mind-numbing drink" (244) served at the McGuire pub, to an unprecedented spirit of resistance and liberation. As Mehran writes, "What Ballinacroagh had been crying out for, what had been lacking from the village all these years, was a bit of the exotic, a taste of the unknown" (244).

The bags that Marjan packed when she lead herself and her sisters away from their unsafe home in Iran, smelled of musty uncertainty once. All they could gather were:

> their grandmother's samovar, the old photographs, the wooden jewellery box. Clothes, bags of dried fruit, jars of torshi and just-made quince and rose-blossom preserves (drenched in sugar, they would provide energy for hard days to come). The last thing Marjan packed was a folder of stacked lined papers, notes and observations of hundreds of recipes, some inherited from her mother, others compiled over the years from her time at The Peacock Restaurant…and a fat botany guide to herb growing she had picked up during her years in the university. (277-278)

The recipes and the herbs help the Sisters survive all odds all the way from Iran through London, up until Ballinacroagh. The Café that they set in Ballinacroagh acts as an oasis- not just for them, but for all in town who offer themselves to succumb to the luring tastes of the Persian savouries. The recipes act as real cures for the lonely souls of Estelle, Danny and several others in Ballinacroagh who live with many repressed emotions, dreams and desires. For Marjan, who actualizes these healings, the myriad seedlings of a pomegranate "could only be the flower of new beginnings" (363). She testifies the warmth and security offered by the walls of her kitchen. She tells herself, "Just get yourself back into the kitchen and decide what to do from there. Surrounded by the safety of its warm walls she just might have a chance to make sense of it all" (268) because she understands that "some of the best recipes are the unwritten ones…and just let the bountiful ingredients lead you" (362).

What is unearthed through the analysis here, is the possibility of a change that is rooted in women's domestic agency and power- a change that is not borne out of protest marches or mass media mobilization, of political campaigns or violent upheavals, but premised upon individual acts of women in the privacy of their domestic kitchens. As Joanne Hollows lays down in her work *Feminism, Femininity and Popular Culture,* there appears to be a quest for an authentic female subjectivity, sans any boisterous demands for egalitarian rights or destructive resistances, with a "middle-class domestic focus" (Forster 169) and "a return to traditional, even feminine roles" (169) where "an attempt is made to unearth a women's cultural tradition which has been hidden, marginalized and/or trivialized by a masculine cultural tradition" (Hollows 29). And as Lilly Kelting observes, a recipe blends past, present and often times future too, "with its ability to stand between the authority of the written history and the movement of bodies in kitchens and communities,

harnessing the paradox within its own medium" (377). Recipe fiction negotiates for the authentic voices of women from across generations, as they speak from their home kitchens. Recipes pronounce the dialectics between continuity and change. They are on one hand, cultural artefacts that preserve the living legacy of cooking, and on the other, texts that impel the cook towards individual signatures on the dishes they prepare. Between conformity and contravention, the self is born.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

The gustatory and nutritive dimensions of food often times occupy the centre stage within the expansive and broad spectrum of food discourses. The alimentary is undoubtedly one of the most elementary things defining lives and cultures. The culinary, though placed at its aperture, is unjustly overlooked and relegated. When ingestion is a commonplace phenomenon that affects all species, and food is an element that concerns all organisms on the planet, what helps Homo sapiens stand distinctively above the others, is the culinary component in their alimentary channel.

The literary canon has for long been, and continues being a mere mirror to the cultural prerogatives, largely determined and shaped by the dominant groups, particularly the patriarchal. Their associated public spaces therefore, have always occupied prime positions and won attention at all times. What has often won the worth of acknowledgement in an individual is his or her position relative to this public domain. Kitchen, and women's experiences and expertise within it, have at most occasions failed to be fit for entry to these domains and therefore made to stand outside the canonical precincts.

A delineation of the history and evolution of the discipline of Food Studies, and a review of a significant corpus of food writings have consequentially exposed a research lacuna that attests the argument that cooking remains the most invisible and unacknowledged of all the acts on the food spectrum. To validate the observation and to expand it to the thought that for women the culinary act of cooking can prove to be a process of identity-assertion, four fictional narratives are analysed, each from a different cultural context. The works are amalgam texts where the conventionally

masculine genre of a novel is appropriated and repurposed by women writers through a conscious grafting with the feminine genre of a cookbook/recipe. The resultant melded combination is Recipe Fiction, which presents the raw, unfiltered sentiments of the cook, and offer themselves as one of the most authentically scripted set of texts that speak women's way. The curated artefacts of recipes add veracity to the lives of the cooks- the true curators of cuisines.

Food writing, particularly, those which are set in and built around its culinary aspects, offer themselves as alternative narratives which speak from outside the boundaries of the mainstream literature and hence remain largely unexplored and understudied. Narratives set in kitchen spaces and which depict women's culinary acts performed from within these intimate, domestic spaces, help explore and establish the possibilities and prospects of reading them as optional recourses to understand women's lives through women's ways. Works of Recipe Fiction are particularly and exclusively culinary, resonating with the sounds and sizzle of pots and pans, and soups and steaks. These hybrid texts fuse the narrative components of a novel and the non-narrative or cultural components in the form of recipes.

The familiarity of food itself is one of the factors that impedes the academic recognition and scholastic significance it deserves. Though a common denominator or a presumed presence in all lives- regardless of the narratives and discourses of hunger and starvation, of poverty and squalor, of deprivation and dearth, induced by economy, race, class, climate and conflict- food is rarely detached from its consumptive definitions and seldom viewed from the realms of preparation and processing. Cooking, serving and feeding are often restricted to fewer hands. Hence any attempt to interpret food from the perspectives of ingesters, and not the cooks,

becomes a reductionist approach; a lopsided attempt, failing in inclusivity. The pleasures of the minority collective of cooks are also wanting to be evaluated, just as the pleasures of the consumers are estimated, valued and oftentimes, celebrated.

The semantics of cooking has often come to be enveloped by an element of ambiguity- culturally and linguistically. Literature has innumerable scenes of repast. Writings of all times have been richly laden with representations of commensality and allusions to the alimentary. However, the reigning question is the relative dearth of academic scholarship on these profuse depictions of food in literature. In spite of the fact that few things lend themselves more easily to conceptualisation than the art and act of self-nourishment, the fact persists that the culinary generally remains poorly estimated and appreciated.

Language and gastronomy have a shared system of articulation in questions pertaining to taste and associated pleasures, and even in being subjected to a pattern of systematic analysis. Literature abounds in gastronomical metaphors. These encoded metaphors imply the translation of flesh into word and therefore the presence of a body language in literary discourse. The oral act of ingestion performed at a meal, implies an underlying and determining culinary grammar that involves the selection, preparation and presentation of food. Gastronomy and literature have strong ties, as eating is paradigmatic of literary acts of dreaming, imagining, fantasising; of nourishing intellectually, just as we are nourished by food. Incidentally, the cook and the writer appear and act on the same plane. They emerge as creators, bringing into effect, metamorphoses of mind and materials.

Kitchen is the prime locus of transformation for the cook. Food is disguised through preparation and presentation, the former mostly requiring fire, but sometimes

even without it. Cooking and writing are two acts that align a lot, in terms of their transformative properties. Both the cook and the writer work at a bricolage of making something new out of something plain and ordinary, through a process of selection, renovation and imagination. This creativity entails a transformation in its creator and also the partaker- physically, emotionally, and intellectually. Etymologically, *mageiros*, the Greek word for cook, traces its origin to magic, thereby making it possible to interpret the cook as a conjuror of magical dishes, where he/she prepares a riveting spectacle in which even the most ordinary and plain of dishes follows a satisfying arc of transformation. Within every such prepared dish lies- besides the obvious raw ingredients- the elements of a story proper; the seeds of a narrative with a beginning, a middle, and an end. The cook drives these transformations and directs and decrees the result.

Cooking is probably an activity that all people have a link with- the link sometimes loud, obvious and direct, and at other times, indirect and subtle. Some people get to view and watch others cooking and take pleasure in that. For some others, this in itself is a luxury as the sight of food is a rare thing. Some elevate themselves from viewers to actual performers when they start handling the ladles and cauldrons on their own and embark on roasting, braising and more by themselves. What Michael Pollan identifies as the Cooking Paradox- the act of watching other people cook- grows to be a common and popular human behavioural trait in the changing times and conditions. Most people have memories of watching their mothers cook in the kitchen and perform feats which sometimes looked like sorcery but resulted in things that could be relished. Though commonly viewed as a drudgery, cooking is something that still persists, and is not completely wiped out. We read, watch and talk about cooking though we do not invest much of our time in actually

doing cooking. Other forms of 'drudgery' are hastily outsourced and dropped from conscious awareness. Cooking however remains in the human fabric and consciousness owing to its emotional and psychological power.

Commensality enables sociability and constructs a matrix that renders concreteness to the ineffable and abstract elements of life. It offers itself as a language that articulates and sustains connections. Cooked food is an exteriorisation of the inner psyche and mindscape of the preparer. Magnifying and foregrounding the 'kitchenscape' amplifies the sputters and mutters emanating from it. This breaks the silence that enshrouds the domestic kitchen spaces. The cook speaks through her dishes and the sonority of her voice gets registered with the partakers of the meal she prepares. The process necessitates a scrutiny of the strategies that she adopts, the patterns she habituates, and the defiances she practices in her kitchen, to assert herself and define her authority. The culinary gets reimagined when one perceives and comprehends how the cook recalibrates the kitchen to tailor it to her purpose.

The lives of the female protagonists of the narratives *Like Water for Chocolate, Pomegranate Soup, The Cuttlefish: A Novel,* and *The Kitchen Daughter: A Novel,* authenticate that the stereotype around the kitchen gets erased, and the space is reinterpreted as a rich bed of scope and hope. The palette of kitchen allows the cook to cater to the pleasures of the partaker's palate. Tita turns it to her den of experiments to articulate her emotions, Marjan's magic transforms into a space of cure and rehabilitation, Ginny repurposes it for her recuperation and Desbiolles' protagonist avails it to paddle out of her insecurities. The novels' protagonists recast the kitchens as their social spaces, from where they articulate and perform their selves. They reclaim and retain their agency through their culinary engagements.

Every culinary act performed in the kitchen is read as an enactment of the cook's self; an expression of her individuality. Cooking is thus a multi-semantic act that gets defined and redefined in a continuum. The protagonists' requisites which urge them to co-opt and appropriate their kitchen spaces and their food preparation, are rarely alimentary or nutritive. They turn cooking into a methodology to script and steer their own life narratives. Their food voice becomes a means to accomplish and attune their kitchens into their own in-between spaces, where the personal is welded into the social. They embrace their kitchens instead of renouncing it. They extend themselves and set their social ties through their culinary acts. Kitchen evolves into a space of possibilities and growth; a space of life, change and progress; a space of becoming, rather than a whirlpool of stasis and paralysis; of immobility and inertia; of simply being.

Kitchen is levered up from its clichéd triviality and parochialism through the nourishing craft of cooking that does not just produce food to sustain life but also enriches and empowers the cook and renders her space and agency. Women reclaim power through this creative craft and convert their vulnerability to empowerment and validation of their selves. Breaking the barricade of binaries and constrictions of place, the spatial connotations of kitchen foreground the untethered progression of the protagonists towards self-inscription. The narratives make the cooks visible through the hoot and smoke in the kitchens, and audible through the din and drill in it. A heterotopic space with its own share of autonomy, the kitchen facilitates a corresponding sense of agency in the cooks, who perform the culinary and manoeuvre their ways towards reconfigurations and redefinitions of their selves through their culinary acts. The protagonists unthink the notions of kitchen as an entrapment and a place of stasis, and prospers on the element of hope, resuscitation and renewal

embedded within it. They do not elude from or evade kitchens, but grow to be possessive of, and draw sustenance from their kitchens. They embrace them as their own. Each of their representations of the kitchen space is personalised with their own creativity and purposed for their own individual needs. The space is reclaimed as a sanctuary to enact their personal and social selves, sculpt and script their lives and to lay the continuum of culture and traditions. They transform their kitchen into a space where their feminine and cultural identities are celebrated to foster a deep sense of belongingness and connections.

Cooking often loses its ground and suffers a disregard, owing to two reasons. Primarily, as it handles the ephemeral entity of food, and also for being a physical labour that calls for just bodily gestures. The study replaces these notions by illuming the idea that cooking is a thoughtful practice that involves action and cognition. As a skilled practice that combines gestural energy and sensory elements, cooking gets reconceptualised as a decolonising phenomenon. It creates a rupturing space that dismantles the spatio-temporal definitions and associations of linearity and progression. It emerges to be an embodied epistemology where dichotomies coexist and binaries interact. Instead of resorting to a mode of denial and disconnection, the protagonists apply their sazon, the sensory logic and knowledge that engages their minds and bodies, the individual and the collective, and establish a connection and completion through their cooking. The protagonists embrace the ordinary and the mundane to forge a culinary connect that transgresses boundaries and stereotypes. Cooking helps them validate their selves and overcome their oppressed states.

Food is a significant ligature bridging the self and the society; the personal and the social. When a cook performs her culinary acts in her kitchen, the sensorial

landscape of the self gets embedded within a broader socio-cultural landscape creating mnemonic impressions which transcend the ephemerality of food and transgress spatial and temporal circumscriptions. Cooking is an embodied knowledge that facilitates the perfect congruence of the cook and the cooked, blurring the boundaries between the subject and the object. This unison accomplishes an agential consciousness that opens up possibilities and pluralities. The knowledge of a cook, vested in her corporeality, helps achieve a sense of agency. The power that is derived through these embodied culinary acts constructs their identities. The viscerality of food corresponds to the corporeality of the cook. Recipe as a cultural inscription attains meaning only in the hands of a cook who translates it into a bodily behaviour. A multidimensional relationship between the cook, the cooked and the consumer is established. The habituated culinary acts of a cook are representations of an embodied memory; a set of remembrances. It is the result of a consistent semiosis- a dynamic interaction between the mindfulness of the brain and the sensoriality of the body. This entails an eruption of involuntary memories, the inscriptions of subjectivity of the cook. Cooking becomes a ritualistic enactment and re-enactment of their memories, bodies and emotions. Kitchen is configured and defined by these individuals through their culinary acts.

Viewed as an intimate space, the kitchen facilitates the construction of a self through the embodied, sensorial memory entrenched in the rhythmic mundanity of cooking. Sutton's concept of gustemology which studies people and their worlds through the sensoriality of food, and his idea of polytemporality which views memory that is constructed through the synaesthetic exercise of cooking, as a creative conduit that connects past, present and future, have aided in analysing the narratives and the characters. A deep sense of the protagonists' subjectivities is garnered by examining

the corporeal and the erotic elements in their culinary gestures. These erotic gestures evolve to be creative gestures which empower the culinary feats of the protagonists.

Culinary memory which is constructed through performative utterances in the form of gestures, postures and bodily movements in the kitchen, is a form of cultural memory constructed in the protagonists through a process of inscription and incorporation, a product of their habit memory. The protagonists invoke the gustemic voices within them alongwith their accumulated food memory, when they perform cooking. Their gustemic selves constructed by an affinity to their home kitchens and a nurturant set of smellscapes and flavours, are articulated through their cooking. Sutton's notion of cooking as risk, which conceives the act as an embodiment of continuity and change, and the Maussian concept of fetishism as a form of memory created around kitchen tools and usage, are employed to read the embodied culinary acts in the novels. Every act of their cooking becomes a sensuous re-enactment of their embodied culinary memory, and through them they perform their selves.

Cooking emerges to be a mnemonic activity- a memory jog- which enacts the coordinated engagement of all the bodily senses, making it an embodied act. Going by the theories propounded by David Sutton and Luce Giard, memory gets interpreted as a sense by itself, defining and driving the novels' protagonists towards a renewed and empowered sense of self. Cooking is studied as an enactment of their embodied memory. It is a far cry from the conventional discursive practices that speak of the mundaneness of cooking, and attempts instead, to read the possibilities embedded in this everyday act. In the narratives, the protagonists transform foodmaking into a thoughtful practice, dismantle the conventional divide of the body and the mind into distant realms, and conjoin the rational and the bodily.

The bodily knowledge engaged in cooking, makes it a performative act- a corporeal practice that shapes the performer. In Recipe Fiction narratives, the embodied practices complement the textual discourse of recipes in cooking, by allowing the performance of the act through a set of bodily gestures, skills, and observed and experienced knowledge. As authenticated by Audre Lorde's notion of the erotic, body is treated as the most strategic and powerful of tools employed in cooking. Cooking involves skill and evolves into a fluid performance which is made possible through repetition, and is re-enacted differently each time, owing to a continuous semiosis. The chapter examines cooking as performed by the protagonists and shaped by a memory moulded by the sensory dimensions of the act which involves and engages with food. Sutton's gustemology stands as the fulcral axis in the analysis of culinary mnemonics that operate in the narratives.

Resistance is a third intrinsic aspect that redefines kitchen and cooking. Food operates as a potentially subversive tool against personal, social and cultural constraints. At the level of preparation, this defiance becomes operational- sometimes in following a secret recipe, sometimes through a total disregard of recipes, or at other times through a subtle improvisation on an accepted recipe. Even the act of feeding itself becomes an assertive act that helps the cook achieve autonomy and authority for herself. Culinary practices are capable of challenging stereotypes, hierarchies, and hegemonic structures. In *Like Water for Chocolate,* it becomes a means for cathartic outpour of emotions which acts therapeutic. In *The Kitchen Daughter: A Novel,* it serves as a means for self-discovery; for a better acceptance of one's own self. In *Pomegranate Soup,* it facilitates a cultural survival at the end of an exodus. In *The Cuttlefish: A Novel,* it becomes a radically defiant act. Each narrative underscores

cooking as far removed from a passive and mundane activity, and reimagines it as a transformative act of resistance.

Cooking invariably stands as the modus operandi or methodology that helps the protagonists enact and achieve their deviance and defiance. In Scottian terms, these resistances become infrapolitics- everyday, individual acts of resistances which stand distinct from the common, violent, dramatic, overt and political rebellions that are synonymously read as revolutions. The subtle and invisible kind of resistances garbed within the delectable dishes that the protagonist cooks prepare, are strategies consciously devised and manipulated by them to accomplish their desires and achieve their emancipation. A transvaluation of codes and conditions that subjugate and silence them, of traditions and norms that restrict them, is achieved through these hidden transcripts - their culinary acts. Embedded within these resistances are the crafts of the self- the ingenious and creative calibre of the cooks, who reimagine the ways of using the space and the act to transgress the oppressive socio-political contexts and traditions imposed on them. Kitchens in the narratives are appropriated into spaces of autonomy and ingenuity, transforming the mundane into the magical. Cooking is studied as a set of embodied, creative and repetitive acts that establish modes and patterns for self-formation. It is assessed as a means to negotiate between the true and affective selves. Everyday resistance is located in the narratives, as a habitual practice which is in constant opposition and interaction with power, through which the resisters gather a deep understanding of themselves and their subjectivities. Hence, contexts, intentions, actual acts, and ways of resistance are given equal impetus in the inquiry.

In *The Cuttlefish: A Novel,* Desbiolles' protagonist cooks, only to trace the trajectory of her own growth from adolescence to adulthood. She realises that her childhood fascination for fleeing was just another manifestation of her inner urge to resist and defy all societal attempts to catalogue and index individuals. As an adult, she enunciates her defiance through cooking. Her culinary acts enamour and equip her to express her dissatisfactions, disillusionments and bitterness in life. Cooking the stuffed cuttlefish is an enactment of killing all the detrimental societal impressions on her. She sails on her reminiscences to eventually triumph over her intimidations. She conquers her sense of incompleteness. She defies the expected norms of ideal femininity, and through cooking, enables herself to embrace her imperfections. Cooking, for her, is coming to terms with the most intimate and untapped power inside her. It is the act of comprehending the dialectics between constancy and fervour to attain and reach a consensual point of transformation.

The story of Tita begins from the De la Garza Ranch kitchen table. From the moment Tita violates all norms of nature to push her way out from her mother's womb prematurely, to the warmer womb of the ranch hearth and its nourishing flavours, her story has been one of defiance. She continues to resist all restraints imposed on her, in her own small and subtle ways. Her cooking helps her stay afloat amidst the tyrannical tirades of her mother. Kitchen gives her a sense of power when she embraces it as an avenue to vent out her emotions and win her heart's desires. The food that Tita prepares, nurtures people around her, and the cooking that she does, nurtures her own self and soul. Tita skilfully transforms kitchen from an oppressive locus to a resourceful haven. She transmutes cooking from a mere drudgery to a delightful art. Her emotions act as catalysing ingredients that bring into effect a transubstantiation of ordinary food into powerful agents of change and autonomy. Her

culinary memory is fostered by Nacha, who shaped her tastes and taught her the art and skill. Habituated into the act, Tita surpasses her subjugation.

Ginny's cooking is a therapeutic pursuit to alleviate her anxiety and overcome her grief. Her immersion into the soothing rhythms of slicing, stirring, and seasoning, is a conscious effort to dispel her pain. Amidst a sensory cocoon that cooking builds, she experiences a sense of warmth and security that shields her from the intimidating society. When flavours, textures and techniques collide in her kitchen, it becomes a space of possibilities for Ginny. Kitchen takes her on a journey of self-discovery. Ginny cooks to reassure herself of her calibre. Her efforts to invoke the spirits of the dead people by cooking from their handwritten recipes, is her resistance to embrace the present and her obsession to decrypt the past about her family and herself. However, a progressive change occurs in Ginny when she decides to accept Gert's invitation to grief cooking outside of her personal kitchen. This community cooking is her way to evolve and extend; her mode to learn empathy; her means to embrace the future.

Marjan and her sisters deploy cooking as a means to break the façade of hostility they face in Ballinacroagh. As a diasporic triad from the Iranian terroir, they diffuse the exotic flavours of the East in the Irish terrain. The wafts of their Persian dishes dispel the monkish monotony that had worked its way to the Ballinacroaghan mindset. The tastes served from Babylon Café appease their appetite and free them of their hunger, lassitude and xenophobia. What Marjan, Bahar, and Layla achieve eventually, is home and peace for themselves, and a real remedy for all their ailments and anxieties, through cooking. The Babylon Café and the Aminpour kitchen offer them a safe oasis where they play out their true selves.

Cooking, a seemingly repressive activity that leaves women exhausted and cantankerous, gets reinterpreted here, as the rejuvenating activity that renews the women protagonists in the novels. Each culinary act is seen to restore and renew their spirit and sense of self. The emancipatory and reformative prospects of cooking are evidenced and established through the analysis. Denuding the constrictive coating of the activity, cooking is projected as a constructive phenomenon or process that brings about metamorphoses of the cook and the cooked. Hierarchies and stereotypes, biases and archetypes are ruptured to realise a reformation and restoration of agency and voice. The aesthetic, polemical and ethical dimensions of the culinary are explored, proving it to be resistive, restorative, recuperative and resuscitative. Cooking evolves to be a distinct mode of defiance; a form of power feminism, where femininity is not devalued or discarded but embraced and practised. In the narratives, cooking is read beyond victimization, combining the indispensable ingredients of creativity, nostalgia, sensuality and agency- an act where the self aspires, talks and attains.

Reconceptualising kitchen as an empowering site involves several challenges which are rooted in cultural, social, historical and gendered dynamics. Though the endeavour is promising in terms of creativity, connectivity, visibility, agency and more, efforts to achieve this calls to contend with mighty structures and institutions that continue to undervalue the culinary and the domestic. Though accomplishing a universal reconceptualisation sounds daunting, efforts to relocate kitchens- both literally and metaphorically- to a more visible and pertinent position in our psyche and within the home-front, would make it more accepted, acknowledged, accommodative and accessible. The true challenge is to confront and contend with the deeply entrenched socio-cultural stereotypes. Within the gamut of its study, this thesis has evaluated and studied the everyday lived experiences, and culinary articulations

from the peripheral kitchen spaces, laying bare the intersections of food, memory and identity. By enquiring into the textualisation of cooking in the fictional narratives, the research has foregrounded the culturality and subjectivity enfolded within it. The experimental, hybrid genre of Recipe Fiction takes an inclusive stance by finding routes to the lives, experiences and expressions of women in the marginal spaces of their domestic kitchens. Recipes bring performativity into the texts and are found to be effective cultural links between past, present and future. These narratives effectively combine the literary with the cultural; the fictional with the vernacular, and are prospective spaces of resistances and subversions of stereotypes. Reconfiguring and reassessing the dimensions and essence of kitchen space has helped comprehend and acknowledge the latent potential of it to accomplish the metamorphoses of the selves who engage in it.

The reductive socio-cultural parameters which bind kitchen to its utilitarian function of food preparation are interrogated to establish a broader interpretation of the site as a dynamic space of possibilities, where cultural practices, embodied knowledge and memory, art and adventure converge. As a rich and productive cultural site, the kitchen facilitates and empowers the cook to explore, engage and experiment with ingredients, techniques, flavours and other accoutrements, in ways which transcend mere sustenance. Cooking emerges as an art and a narrative, embedded with both personal and collective histories within the sensory realm of food. With each culinary act, kitchen rises into a conduit of intergenerational ties and transmissions, where knowledge is preserved and perpetrated; enacted and re-enacted.

Kitchen spaces serve themselves as adaptable, flexible and multifunctional spaces that respond to the individual user’s social, intellectual and emotional needs.

They offer pedagogical pathways allowing the transfer of embodied culinary knowledge and experience. They also become social spaces where conversations are channelled through food, between its preparers and partakers. The cadences of cooking offer a form of meditative engagement, transforming the space into a zone of solace and self- reflection- a dynamic and fluid space that effects a continuous redefinition of itself, and reinforces its role as a site of agency, creativity and transformation.

Chapter 6

Recommendations

Gustemic lifeworlds are multihued and vibrant. The multiple significations of food render a polychromatic, layered anatomy to its field. The emergent domain of Food Studies is one of the newest but promising intersections for literary explorations. Writers across epochs have sometimes candidly, and at other times consciously chosen food tropes and analogies to converse of life and communicate with the world. Through a symbiotic positioning of food and words, Recipe Fiction writers braid the intricate facets of culinary domesticity, to perfection. By laying a culinary pathway that uniquely intertwines food and fiction; culinary and literary artistry, Recipe Fiction has helped in foregrounding and reclaiming the domestic kitchen spaces. They stand distinct for their tenacious defence of female sorority and subjectivity. They seek to recalibrate the power of the culinary by examining its landscape through the eyes of female cooks, thereby leaving the masculine side of the terrain underexplored. With the changing gender dynamics and evolving equations of responsibilities in the domestic front, the scope of a study featuring masculinities in food preparation acts in domestic culinary spaces demand attention. Such a study potentially brings forth the redefinitions and negotiations of masculine identities by challenging stereotypes and resetting social signifiers.

Cooking has been cast into modern and postmodern moulds successively in the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries, only to re-emerge as ‘deskilled’, and sometimes futuristic. In the light of this change, a comparative study of culinary practices may be a worthy field of inquiry. The traditional and sensorial culinary practices which engage with family recipes and kitchen heirlooms, and which reflect

and preserve cultural legacies and identities, can be compared with the modern, facile, smart, mechanised and transnational type of culinary and alimentary practices and habits. This has the potential to illumine the psychology of cooks, as it aids in assessing the interactive capacities of cooking, and also in integrating the paradox around it. A comparative approach of this model may also allow room for a historical probe into the cultural narratives which embed specific dishes and edible ingredients that shape individuals and communities.

Though the intersections of food- particularly dietary practices- with race, caste, colour and religious identities have begun to be explored, yet, the intersections of culinary practices with these hierarchical edifices have not been studied sufficiently. This offers itself as a promising avenue that opens up numerous vistas for future research. Examining how specific cooking techniques, ingredients, and meal structures are racial or are caste-specific, and how these culinary practices both shape and reflect social identities, is sure to add crucial insights to the discipline .The role of food preparation rituals—such as the sanctity of certain cooking methods in religious communities or caste-based taboos—warrants deeper exploration. Narratives and testimonials of marginalised communities, are cultural mines of culinary wealth, showcasing their cooking practices and rituals. A study of these texts does not only expose the politics of social divisions ‘preserved’ and ‘perpetrated’, but also enriches our knowledge of cultural heterogeneity. Shahu Patole’s *Dalit Kitchens of Marathwada,* translated by Bhushan Korgaonkar is one such recent narrative that presents the patchworked platters of the marginalised Mahar community of India, and exposes the debatable practice of ascribing a region its identity, by the food practices of the elite. A study that examines and explores such invisible kitchens and cuisines

through their narratives will very effectively reveal the variegated, rich culinary landscape of each culture.

Cooking in conflicted zones and times also deserves much attention. *In Memory's Kitchen: A Legacy from the Women of Terezin* is one among the few books that capture the lives of women whose hands scripted the recipes it contains while in captivity in the Nazi concentration camps of Terezin. The missing steps in the recipes cry out the starvation they were subjected to; a painful illustration of the misery they were caught in. Beyond capturing the essence of their legacy, the recipes also were strong means that helped these Jewish women preserve their spirit and survive the torture. Of a similar nature is *The Gaza Kitchen: A Palestinian Culinary Journey* by Laila El-Haddad and Maggie Schmitt which explores the culinary traditions of Gaza. Pitted against the richness of their cuisine is the resilience of the people of Gaza who are subjected to some of the most grossly inhumane treatments, and are forced to adapt to the challenges they confront. The book is a melange of personal stories, cultural insights and historical context, depicting the daily struggles of the people of Gaza, caught in conflict and turmoil. Like the women of Terezin, recipes offer these Palestinians a means to resist and survive. *Cook This Book: Recipes from Ukraine* is another book that brings forth voices from Eastern Europe, the war-torn Ukraine. From borscht and dumplings to salads and sweets, the book serves and shares personal narratives and reflections on food and its significance in wartime, stressing on it as a means of resilience and survival, in body and mind. Studying food, its preparation, rationing, recipe improvisations, the issues of hunger and dearth, and more that happen during crises and conflicts is well worth scholastic scrutiny. Trauma cooking, amidst shell shocks and stressors, or among pogroms and persecutions also demand attention. Refugee cooking is yet another unexplored sub-field of the domain,

which can bring under its purview, stories of food entangled in migrations and struggles, as described in refugee narratives.

Language and gastronomy survive from generation to generation, mostly through women. Hence, behemoth culinary projects which document and study ancestral artefacts and recipes, wisdom of grannies, who are the saviours of cuisines by being the keepers and transmitters of ancestral flavours and culinary heritage, and transgenerational treasures from the kitchen, can be undertaken. Recipes can be particularly studied for their use and role in digital humanities, and public histories, and also to interrogate upon the notions of authenticity and authorship/authority around them.

With a growing awareness of climate crisis and a bold articulation of it in fiction, climate cooking offers itself as yet another possible area of critical scrutiny. Culinary food practices that integrate climate resilience and sustainability has much scope amidst escalating climate erraticism and disasters. Climate cookbooks which draw up sustainable recipes and promote eating locally and seasonally, is another emergent sub-genre.

Food being a universal language and a connector of hearts across time and space, is sure to evolve through varied transactions. It creates an invisible web of history and belonging that tether generations and cultures. The intangible and tangible wealth of recipes and heirlooms are sure to meld together people, places and times, evolving as recourses for succour and survival, and offering scope for further studies in the field of food.

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