CULINARY IMAGES AND IDENTITY IN THE SELECTED FICTION OF THREE INDIAN DIASPORIC WOMEN WRITERS

A THESIS

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SHWETA NAMDEV RAO

DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY ROORKEE
ROORKEE - 247 667 (INDIA)

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ROORKEE

CANDIDATE'S DECLARATION

I hereby certify that the work which is being presented in the thesis entitled **CULINARY IMAGES AND IDENTITY IN THE SELECTED FICTION OF THREE INDIAN DIASPORIC WOMEN WRITERS** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy and submitted to the Department of Humanities & Social Sciences of the Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee, Roorkee is an authentic record of my own work carried out during the period January 2007 to January 2010 under the supervision of Dr. Rajyashree Khushu-Lahiri, Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee, Roorkee.

The matter presented in this thesis has not been submitted by me for the award of any other degree of this or any other Institute.

(Shweta Namdev Rao)

This is to certify that the above statement made by the candidate is correct to the best of my knowledge.

(Dr. Rajyashree Khushu-Lahiri)
Assistant Professor
Dept. of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee
Roorkee

Date: 1/2/2010

The Ph.D. Viva-Voce examination of Shweta Namdev Rao, Research Scholar has been held on

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Signature of the Supervisor

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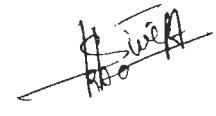

Shweta Namdev Rao

ABSTRACT

Food in fiction is a recent phenomenon. The seemingly mundane ritual of food preparation and consumption was deemed too trivial to be portrayed in the grand narratives of phallogocentric literary tradition. The importance of food in fiction augmented after the surge of post feminist/ third wave feminist phase where food and cookery were upheld because of their inextricable relation with women's traditional domain i.e., the kitchen. Hence contemporary fiction by women writers is replete with images related to food and consumption. These literary works capture the glimpses of food in different stages of production cycle - the inception of recipes, the process of baking, boiling, roasting etc., consumption and post-consumption rituals, anxieties related to body and signification of food per se. These images carry forth the later feminist agenda of incorporating the experience of women into literature. In addition to asserting their gendered subjectivity, the women writers also respond to the broader questions of their racial, national, ethnic identities and hence, food becomes the site which negotiates and displays the identities of the corresponding authors. It is increasingly noticed that in this globalized world a particular cuisine metonymizes a community and perpetuates essentialist association between identity and food. However, in the contemporary fictional scenario this essentialism is subverted and food is foregrounded as an empowering agency.

The present study analyzes culinary images in the selected writings of the three diasporic Indian writers settled in America, viz. Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Jhumpa Lahiri. This study does not merely enumerate the culinary images in the selected texts but interrogates the relationship between food

and identity. The texts selected for this study are Mukherjee's *Wife* (1975) and *Jasmine* (1989), Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices* (1997) and *Queen of Dreams* (2004), Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreters of Maladies* (1999) and *The Namesake* (2003). The selected works abound in food images and highlight the expatriate/immigrant experience in America. The central characters of almost all the texts are women who respond to immigration through cookery and food consumption. The immigrant life is beleaguered with dichotomies of inside-oustside, east-west and past-present and this study proves that these bipolarities are displayed and resolved through food images. It also delves into the bipolar world of the diasporic Indian community settled in America and insists that the repeated rendering of indigenous food preparation enables the community to reaffirm its identity and fight against cultural homogenization.

This study does not draw parallels between the three writers and the food images they employ, but explores the diverse ways these writers capture the identity formation of their characters through food. Mukherjee the eldest of the three writers, who has discarded the hyphenated identity of Asian-American bestowed upon her by the critics, has an equivocal stand on cookery. One the one hand she foregrounds kitchen as the domain which perpetuates the identity of immigrant subjects shielding them from the cultural hegemony of America and on the other hand, she portrays the same space as a traditional site of women's subjugation which circumscribes their development as individuals. Dimple, in *Wife,* limits herself within the confines of her kitchen but desires the world outside and the novel ends with her murdering her husband with the vegetable knife in her kitchen. Cookery give her some respite from cultural alienation, albeit partially. Her neurosis is reflected in her distorted

imaginings about food and body. Jasmine uses Indian food to subvert the taste of the American populace she interacts with. She is conscious about her unavoidable essentialization because of her identity, and she resorts to strategic exoticism through her cookery for her easy rite of passage into the American mainstream. This study shows that Mukherjee's selected writings feature the nexus between food and body and its eventual decay to implicate the process of assimilation of the immigrant community in America.

Jhumpa Lahiri fictionalizes the daily lives of Bengali Americans. Their every day trials and tribulations are presented through the medium of apparently mundane ritual of cookery. Through the seemingly commonplace and rather personal narrative of food, Lahiri negotiates the political question of identity of the immigrant community. In the stories of *Interpreter of Maladies*, this study observes that food is presented as an alternative medium of communication. It reflects and to some extent, affects human emotions and relationship. The study maps the complicated relationship of the second generation immigrants with the first generation as depicted through food in *The Namesake*. While Lahiri retrieves the political meaning of being an immigrant in America through the mundane aspect of food consumption, Divakaruni reinscribes the significance of food and spices on identity by connecting them with magic and augury. In *The Mistress of Spices*, Divakaruni utilizes the colonial connotations of spices to negotiate power in the postcolonial world. The spices are portrayed as nourishing agents which give power to the Indian American community for resisting racism and facing everyday challenges in America. *Queen of Dreams* not only concretizes the role of food in identity preservation but also displays 'authentic' Indian food as a source of capital generation in America.

Further, this novel problematizes the domain of the kitchen as a gendered space. Both the selected works of Divakaruni underpin the identity of the Indian community through the medium of food and magic.

This study reveals that food images in the selected texts are interlaced with the sexual and racial identity of the diasporic community. Thus, these texts foreground food, making it the locus for the amalgamation of the traditional and the modern.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

> Food in fiction is mainly social. It draws characters together, but they seldom require it psychologically, seldom enjoy it, and never digest it unless specially asked to do so. They hunger for each other, as we do in life, but our equally constant longing for breakfast and lunch does not get reflected.
>
> — E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (49)

> Food is central to our sense of identity. The way any given human group eats helps it assert its diversity, hierarchy and organization, and at the same time, both its oneness and the otherness of whoever eats differently. Food is also central to our individual identity, in that any given human individual is constructed, biologically, psychologically and socially by the food he/she chooses to incorporate.
>
> — Claude Fischler, "Food, Self and Identity" (3)

In his insightful and pioneering treatise on the novel as a genre E.M. Forster enumerates differences between 'Homo Fictus' and Homo Sapiens, one of the differences being the attitude of the fictional characters towards food. The former is not as obsessed with food as his real life counterpart, because the preoccupation of human beings with food was not deemed fit to be incorporated in any fictional narrative mediated by the phallogocentric tradition. *Aspects of the Novel* was published in 1927 when the golden halo around liberal humanism was yet to fade. In subsequent years literary theory shook the foundation of the fictional idyll – the author was declared dead, the private became political, the "subalterns" not only spoke but were acclaimed as well. In the present scenario food is depicted more often in fiction and is loaded with multiple significations. The category of the culinary is espoused by feminist studies because kitchen and food have been inextricably related to women. The anxiety of food consumption and its relationship

with the body has been captured by women's writings as well as the depiction of women as 'food' in misogynist writings. Food is increasingly being foregrounded in fiction as an identity marker and writers employ the tropology of food and consumption because of their myriad interpretative possibilities. In the world affected by globalization, suspicions related to alien food are replaced by cravings for new cuisines; moreover, communities are identified by and associated with the kind of food they consume. Perhaps this essentialist connection between food and communal/racial identity prods writers, and women writers in particular, who belong to differing ethnic groups, to narrativize upon food in fiction.

The present study analyzes the selected fictional writings of three women of the Indian diaspora settled in the United States by exploring the different ways in which identity is displayed and negotiated through culinary images. The selected texts are: Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife* (1975) and *Jasmine* (1989), Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) and *The Namesake* (2003), Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices* (1997) and *Queen of Dreams* (2004). After a brief background study about food in literature, this chapter will legitimize and justify the need for this study through a review of critical and scholarly studies available in the area. Further, a section in this chapter will be dedicated to elaborate on the objectives of this study and throw some light on the chapter division of this dissertation.

The cliché "you are what you eat" is circulated more zealously than ever before (Raja and Thieme, xix). In this multicultural global village, which upholds pluralism at least theoretically, people celebrate identities through various means. Thus, food is a very important identity marker. One can mark a global culinary carnival where food from different parts of the world is consumed with gusto. This

increased consumption of ethnic food on the one hand refers to the reduced resistance to the cultural 'Other' and on the other hand points out the necessity of, to (mis)use the phrase by W.J.T. Mitchell, the "colonial peripheries" to come to the "imperial centres" for its legitimization (477). This gastronomical celebration is apparently a ritual enabled by economic surpluses of the first world countries, which is in stark contradiction with the scarcity of food in other parts of the world. The first world indulges in ethnic food as an act of eating the "other", while the third world caters to the ethnic food market as a subversive strategy of entering the mainstream white market for economically viable reasons (Molz, 77.) The converse is also true; the food joint chains like McDonald's are seen as Americanization of the world's platter, as analyzed superbly by George Ritzer. Thus, the discourse of food is fraught with numerous contradictions.

Cookery was until late an invisible act occurring uneventfully within the confines of the kitchen. Though the authorial eyes have learned to observe the bedroom activities with voyeuristic gusto, the same have been reluctant to focus on the women's traditional domain i.e. the kitchen. Though trivialized and neglected by art theories, cookery has been everyday ritual enabling women to exhibit their creativity in the circumscribed domain allotted to them. Just as quilting and knitting have become a metaphor for women's creativity and empowerment, cookery is a dominant symbol of women's unchronicled and unacknowledged creativity worldwide. What are the implications of such widespread food fixation in contemporary fiction? Although traditionally cookery has been placed in the category of trivial domestic work, this study considers it as a cultural text. In the same manner as the pen has become a metaphorical needle; the literary seamstresses have embroidered their kind of creativity into the quilt of history. The authors act as

cooks, their pens become ladles, and their texts become simmering hot literary dishes by transforming cookery into a symbol of female subjectivity. Thus cookery is no longer a mundane task, but part of the feminist meta-text. Cooking in the enclosed space of the kitchen is not an act of submissiveness but challenges the dominant cultural mode through being part of it. Cookery as depicted in the texts under discussion becomes a cultural marker and a metaphor for creativity. This trend is a further progress of the post feminist phase, when the vehement radicalism of the feminist rebellion has subsided; and literature and literary theories do underpin female experiences, albeit, subtly. In the feminist phase, women's writings celebrated the aesthetics of the body politic. The private unhesitatingly entered the public. Until lately women's writings asserted a "very powerful sexual determination in language and language use, and in particular to valorise sexual difference as male/female, female versus male, by an appeal to signs and correspondences of a femininity, a femaleness – flow, liquid, lips, holes – as well as to specifically women's experiences – menstruation, pregnancy, and so on" (Heath, 221). In the post-feminist phase not only the physical experiences, but also the social, economic and cultural life of women is captured in women's writings and diverse female experiences are given their due space. Studies of food in literature started with the second wave of feminism – where cooking was seen as repressive, and kitchen as the site of sexual subordination of women since centuries. It is only lately that the recuperative and empowering aspect of cookery is foregrounded by women writers and critics alike and this development is summarized succinctly in Drake McFeeley proclamation, "We do not need to lose our kitchens to keep our freedom" (169). The experiences, which are a part of women's collective consciousness, are problematized in the contemporary literary scenario. This

explains the recurrence of tropes and motifs viz. embroidery, knitting, quilting and cookery in women's writings. Patricia Meyer Spacks explains that women write differently "...for readily discernible historical reasons women have characteristically concerned themselves with matters more or less peripheral to male concerns, or at least slightly skewed from them. The differences between traditional female preoccupations and roles, and male ones make a difference in female writing" (6). Thus, Mukherjee, Lahiri and Divakaruni's literary 'dishes' are attempts to record the 'peripheral activity' of females. They themselves are 'peripheral' not just because they are portraying a traditional female activity, but because they all belong to the ethnic American community. As Rosenfelt observes, "post-feminist literature is a reflux of "other" voices" (287). The women writers in question are not a part of mainstream culture but are situated in the interstitial space of being diasporic Third-World beings. Aijaz Ahmad in *In Theory* (1992) explains the category of 'third world women' within the broader gamut of third world writing. According to him, third world women are, "non-white women who needed to articulate a feminism different in some key respects from the high-bourgeois feminism of many white professionals, with oppressions of race and class layered together with the issue of gender" (87). Race, class, nationality, ethnicity, religion and gender everything is served together, spiced and synthesized, in these novels through culinary idioms. By co-opting the domestic idioms, the writers legitimize their creative identities. Hence, it is irrefutable that culinary fiction is a part of the movement, which advocates speaking for the unspoken and theorizing the (seemingly) trivial. Culinary art involves the production of food material, the inception of recipes, the process of baking, boiling, roasting etc., dressing the food synthesized by this, consuming, and finally, the post-consumption ritual. It will not

be hyperbolic to state that, though mostly overlooked and hardly theorized, gastronomical activity is eternal. Though, Elizabeth Telfer in her remarkable essay "Food as Art" (1995) argues that there are important reasons due to which it is not possible to consider cookery as a high art form such as painting and music, yet she maintains that cookery is a simple and a minor art form and cannot be dismissed as a paltry part of everyday life. Similarly, this study contends that the poetics of food and cookery in the selected fictional works has important political implications.

This study reads cookery vis-à-vis cultural and sexual identities of the characters through the selected texts. The authors are themselves diasporic beings negotiating their identities, while their female protagonists are faced with dichotomies of inside-outside, east-west, past-present etc. This study establishes that these bipolarities are displayed and resolved through food images. It delves into the bipolar world of diasporic Indian community settled in America and insists that the repeated rendering of indigenous food preparation enables the community to reaffirm its identity and resist cultural homogenization. All the selected works of fiction narrativize immigrant women's experiences and use food as a subversive tool for their survival in the United States. This dissertation does not intend to merely list food imageries present in the texts, but it examines the role of food and consumption in the diasporic scenario. The research seeks to analyze the interpenetration of gender, ethnicity, class and nationality with food and related gastronomical practices through the selected fictional works.

Food is employed as a dense symbol standing for multitudes of things; it is indeed an apt symbol for viewing the postmodern novel as a Bakhtinian polyphonic genre. Authors use food to narrativize the various aspects of identity, viz. racial, economic, sexual, artistic, and cultural. Most importantly, women writers use the

idioms of the kitchen to present a glimpse of the tethered domestic space attributed to women since centuries; cookery is portrayed as a form of artistic expression. Writers resort to culinary images in order to narrativize women in the domestic arena. This literary experiment has emerged as a new sub genre in fiction called food fiction. This genre was popularized by Laura Esquivel's Mexican novel translated into English as *Like Water for Chocolate*: *A Novel in Monthly Installments, With Recipes, Romances, and Home Remedies* (1992). This novel is stylistically innovative insofar as it embeds Mexican recipes within its structure. Of late, ethnic food fiction is written by women writers of Indian origin e.g. Amullya Malladi's *Serving Crazy with Curry (2004)*, Bharati Kircher's *Pastries: A Novel of Dessert and Discoveries* (2004), Esther David's *Book of Rachel* (2006), Monica Pradhan's *The Hindi-Bindi Club* (2007) etc. Moreover, the readers are allowed to cook like the protagonist with the help of the tedious recipes embedded within the novel. This kind of fiction, to the chagrin of their writers, is labeled as 'Chick-lit'.

However, this study limits itself to food *in* fiction rather than the food fiction. Writers like Anita Desai in *Fasting and Feasting* (1999) demonstrate how the secret language of food expresses our inner lives and Sara Suleri's *Meatless Days* (1990) uses culinary images for documenting the 'alternate history' of her nation. Lately, Kiran Desai in her Booker prize winning novel *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), delineates class distinction between Sai, an Anglicized girl, and Gyan, her working class teacher, through food. Even the parallel plot of the father – son deals with cooking; the father cooks British food in a small town house in India, while the son cooks Indian food at various restaurants in America. All the mentioned writers present the story of identities in flux through food. Food interrogates and negotiates identity, further, it is also employed by writers to delineate national

history and is shown as affecting the collective consciousness of the third world citizens. The role of food in fiction does not end here; even the literary language is analogous to a certain kind of food, Salman Rushdie's brilliant form of Indian English was canonized as 'chutnified' English after *Midnight's Children* (1981). Words like 'curry' and 'masala' are commonly used in Queen's English and have a wide range of meanings, but most significantly, such phrases signify anything that is ethnic, exotic and/or different.

It is important to reiterate the fact that it is only recently that theorists were concerned about food in culture and food symbols in literature. Food fiction and theorization on food in fiction is an emerging field of study, and this study will draw upon the existing corpus of work on food and cultural/social studies and food in literary studies. A brief survey of the work done in this area follows.

Several critical thinkers have contributed to the theorization of food and its significance in fiction. Levi-Strauss presents the dichotomy between the raw and the cooked to derive the structuralist binary between nature and culture. According to him 'raw' signifies nature and 'cooked' denotes culture. Mary Douglas compares the food taboos prevalent in various communities and infers that communal identities in primitive societies were constructed through eating practices. R.S. Khare analyses the importance of various rites and rituals pertaining to food in the Indian context by using the 'raw cooked' paradigm only to subvert it as these categories are not static. A.K. Ramanujan draws inspiration from Levi-Strauss and Khare and analyses the signification of food in folktales from India in "Food for Thought: Towards an Anthology of Hindu Food-images" (1984). He displays different "paradigms in which 'food' participates." He uses texts from Kannada literature and folklore to interpret the symbol of food and suggests that food symbolism is a part of the

cultural system just as language is; therefore, food symbols should be treated critically in terms of rhetoric and poetics. AR Venkatachalapathy in his insightful article "In Those days there was no Coffee" explains how coffee was co-opted into the Tamil culture and contributed in the construction of Tamil identity as contradistinct from non-Tamil/North Indian tea consuming cultures right from the colonial period. Arjun Appadurai in his seminal essay "How to make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India" studies cookbooks as historical documents reflecting the political economic conditions that created it. He displays how regional diversity of the homogenized category of the 'Indian food' was undermined through cookbooks. Ashis Nandy's essay "The Changing Popular Culture of Indian Food: Preliminary Notes" delves into the changing trends in the restaurant sector and the Indian fast food industry. Further, it analyses the hierarchies observed in serving regional food by the restaurants. Virinder Kalra in his essay "The Political Economy of the Samosa" examines *samosa,* a popular Indian snack as a convenience food in the U.K. Further, he also observes that the high visibility of 'samosa' celebrates it as a multicultural commodity but undermines the 'invisible' labour of the females of the Indian immigrant community in the U.K.

Timothy Morton's *The Poetics of Spice: Romantic Consumerism and the Exotic* (2006) is an interesting treatise on the representation of spices in Romantic literature. He reads spices as a dense metaphor; as a sign of signs that symbolize numerous contradictory concepts and employs Marxist theory and psychoanalysis to probe the semiotics of spices in the colonial world. Further, he re-reads the literary and non-literary works of Milton, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, Leigh Hunt, Charlotte Smith and Southey among many others in the context of spice trade and the construction of national and colonial identities. Jack Turner has compiled a cultural

material history of spices in his book *Spice: The History of Temptation* (2005). Lizzie Collingham's *Curry: A Tale of Cooks and Conquerors* (2005) delves into the culinary history of India as influenced by the British Raj. The book which is embedded with several recipes has an interesting revelation that quintessentially 'Indian' curry, tea and other such dishes were concocted by the British in their imaginings about India. The colonial connotation of spices and sugar is delineated by Sharmila Sen in her "Indian Spices across the Black Waters" where she studies the fictional works of Indo-Caribbean writers. Uma Narayan's "Eating Culture: Incorporation, Identity and Indian Food" is an interesting scholarly work which is divided into three sections. The first section studies the 'fabrication' and appropriation of curry by the British in colonial India, the second section observes food as a site of difference and contention in India and the last section depicts curry as an ethnic food with reference to the Indian community in England.

Food and Cultural Studies (2004) by Bon Ashley, Joanne Hollows, Steve Jones and Ben Taylor examines the contemporary British food culture. This study attempts to map the convergence of cultural studies and food studies. The section devoted to family meals investigates the near extinction of home cooked food and the widespread consumption of commercial food. According to the authors, the changing pattern of food consumption displays a deep rooted change in the family structure. This study also analyzes the paradox that though few people are interested in cookery and fewer people know how to cook, nonetheless the popularity of British television cookery shows and cook books have steadily increased. *The Cultural Politics of Food and Eating: A Reader* (2005) edited by James L. Watson and Melissa L. Caldwell is a collection of essays on food and culture. It studies the cultural dynamics that lead to the changing trends of food consumption and

production around the world. From McDonaldization in various third world countries to the exoticization of the American platter, this collection captures the political dynamics affecting consumption. Purnima Mankekars's essay on Indian grocery stores in Bay Area which is included in Watson and Caldwell's book throws light on how such stores become the sites of preservation of culture. Such stores transcend their functions of being mere grocery stores, and become a community centre for the immigrant Indian population of the neighbourhood. Warren Belasco in his essay conflates food and counterculture movement and records the rise of 'peasant' home baked brown bread as part of the rebellion against mechanized mass production. *Food: Critical Concepts in the Social Sciences* (2008) edited by David Inglis, Debra Gimlin, and Chirs Thorpe is a multivolume collection of essays on food and its significance in social sciences. The essays range from importance of food as a social symbol from the colonial to postcolonial era. It has essays on food from ancient times to the contemporary food industry. From Barthes' personal observation on French food to Krishnendu Ray's essay on Bengali American food ways, the collection attempts to capture diverse trends within the broader gamut of food studies.

In "Eating Difference: The Cosmopolitan Mobilities of Culinary Tourism", (2007) Jennie Germann Molz analyses the politics of 'self' and 'other' in the Culinary Tourism. Jane Bennett in "Edible Matter" (2007) argues for an interesting form of "materiality", wherein she considers human beings as passive receivers while food is an active agent exercising power and control over them. She discusses how the food consumed becomes an integral part of the consumer.

> Edible material is an agent inside and alongside intention-forming, morality-(dis)obeying, language-using, reflexivity-wielding, culture-making human

> beings. Food is an active inducer-producer of salient, public effects, rather than a passive resource at the disposal of consumers.... Eating, then, reveals not only the interdependence of humans and edible matter, but also a capacity to effect social change inherent in human and nonhuman bodies alike. (134)

Civilization is not just built by human perseverance, but by the joint venture of the human and non-human bodies alike. Food is, as Bennett hints, more than "inert, brute matter". Food acts upon humans and propels the latter into action. Hence, the kitchen activity is of epic importance.

After a brief examination of studies on food and consumption from the point of view of social sciences and culture studies, an overview of the study of food in literature follows. Sarah Sceats' *Food, Consumption and the Body in Contemporary Women's Fiction* (2000) is one of the pioneering works which explores the significance of food and eating in contemporary women's fiction. She suggests that women are more connected to food because of their traditional and biological roles as feeders as well as their roles as consumers. Sceats reveals how preoccupations with food, its consumption and the body are central to the works of writers such as Doris Lessing, Angela Carter, Margaret Atwood, MichËle Roberts and Alice Thomas Ellis. She contends that women's writings range "from explorations of female culinary sensuousness, creativity and authority in cooking, to the exercise of power or political responsibility through food and acts of eating, to the revisiting of earlier depictions of women's sexuality through appetite and eating..." (2). She explores various metaphors implied through food; the writers connect food with sexuality, motherhood, love and power.

Word of Mouth: Food and Fiction After Freud (2002) by Susanne Skubal is an examination of the importance of oral experience as reflected in literature, "Word of Mouth" extends psychoanalytic theory propounded by Freud, Julia Kristeva and others. *Mapping Appetite: Essays on Food, Fiction and Culture* (2007) by Jopi Nyman and Pere Gallardo is a collection of case studies dealing with the representation of food and culinary activity in a variety of cultural texts, including post-colonial and popular fiction, women's magazines and food writing. The volume explores the various functions of food in post-colonial writing ranging from Salman Rushdie and Anita Desai to Zadie Smith and Maggie Gee in the context of globalization and multiculturalism. The book shows how issues of gender, nation and race are present in food narratives. *From Betty Crocker to Feminist Food Studies: Critical Studies on Women and Food* (2005) edited by Arlene Voski Avakian and Barbara Haber has a wide ranging collection of essays on the theme of food and contemporary culture. The introductory essay "Feminist Food Study: A Brief History" records the gradual rise of the food studies despite the initial reluctance of feminist studies to incorporate food studies in its fold. The essay explains the role of identity, gender, consumer culture in what they refer to as feminist food study. The book has an interesting range of essays, one such essay is "Chili Peppers as Tool of Resistance: Ketan Mehta's *Mirch Masala*" in which Beheroze F. Shroff analyses Mehta's film *Mirch Masala* (1985) and explores the symbolism of chilli peppers showcased throughout the film. The paper contends chilli is used by the filmmaker as a trope of resistance and empowerment of women in the colonial scenario.

John Thieme and Ira Raja have co-edited an anthology entitled *The Table is Laid: An Oxford Anthology of South Asian Food Writing* (2007) which focuses on

food writings from South Asian region. Perhaps the first of its kind, the anthology has an eclectic range of writings from A. K. Ramanujan's essay on food to an extract from Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices,* from Chitrita Banerjee's food memoir to an extract from a Kashmiri novel. Thieme and Raja present a comprehensive "Introduction" where they try to generate critical thinking on the interpretative possibilities of food and they contend "Its [food's] discourses are complex semiotic systems, or metalanguages that offer vocabularies for commenting on virtually all areas of social experience". They strive to generate discussion on "the associations surrounding food in everyday as well as literary contexts" (lv).

In "Culinary Eros in Contemporary Hispanic Female Fiction: From Kitchen Tales to Table Narratives" (2006), Zubiaurre Maite theorizes on the relation of food with sexuality in Hispanic literature. According to her, displaying women in kitchen reinforces the traditional stereotype. Kitchen comes across as a private locus of mystery and sorcery, thus alienated from the rationalist discourse of the public sphere. She differentiates between what she calls, "kitchen tales" and "table narratives". The former isolates the cook/protagonist by keeping her in the magical realm of the kitchen. She is either a virgin mother or a powerful witch, devoid of either sexual or gastric appetite. The protagonist is not a consumer of food, but the preserver of the magic recipes. While on the other hand, the "table narratives succeed in breaking the vicious circle of (cooking) women stubbornly depicted as witches, virgins, nurturers, and mothers... women appear at the other end of the food production line, namely as "real" consumers, and not as producers, endowed with magical skills, of culinary delicacies" (31). Maite in the end looks at the 'real' empowered consumer woman as the outcome of the prototypical producer/ provider woman. In "Boutique Multiculturalism and the Consumption of Repulsion: Re-

Disseminating Food Fictions in Malaysian and Singaporean Diasporic Novels" (2007), Tamara S. Wagner uses the concept of Stanley Fish's "multiculturalism" to explain food metaphors in Singaporean and Malaysian fiction. In "'Mouthwork': Food and Language as the Corporeal Home for the Unhoused Diasporic Body in South Asian Women's Writing" (2005) Sneja Gunew correlates the experience of mouth in language and food through selected writings of Meena Alexander, Suniti Namjoshi and Sujata Bhatt. In her essay entitled "Reading Communities and Culinary Communities: The Gastropoetics of the South Asian Diaspora" (2002), Parama Roy investigates "how food and cooking have become, in several texts, the favored optic (or more properly, trope) to filter questions of national-diasporic filiation and affiliation and their economies of taste and consumption" (476). She studies the 'gastropoetics' of the diaspora through Madhur Jaffrey's cookbooks and Sara Suleri's acclaimed *Meatless Days*. Anita Mannur in her essay "Culinary Nostalgia: Authencity, Nationalism, and Diaspora" (2007) posits the role of nostalgia in the construction of the 'culinary citizenship' of the Asian American populace. She maintains,

> The desire to remember home by fondly recreating culinary memories cannot be understood merely as reflectively nostalgic gestures; rather such nostalgically-framed narratives must also be read as meta-critiques of what it means to route memory and nostalgic longing for a homeland through one's relationship to seemingly intractable culinary practices which yoke national identity with culinary taste and practices... .Food, therefore, becomes a potent symbols for signifying the ethnic integrity of Asian Americans, serving both as a placeholder for marking cultural distinctiveness and as a palliative for dislocation. (13)

Further, she derives the relationship of nostalgia and food in the selected works by Shani Mootoo, Sara Suleri and Madhur Jaffrey. Heather Latimer explicates the process of abjection as theorized by Julia Kristeva through the food images of Hiromi Goto. In the opening passage she posits the relation between gender and racial identity in food studies.

It is evident that the correlation between food, gender and race is well established in the studies reviewed. Food is one of the most important markers of the individual and communal identity, and its importance gets accentuated in the diasporic context. Hence, it becomes imperative that we understand the meaning of diaspora before we proceed to review important works in the area. The term was originally used to designate the displaced Jew community and later came to signify any community displaced from its original inhabitation. The category of Indian diaspora is not a homogenous one, as different sets of sociopolitical conditions have given rise to the heterogeneous Indian diasporic community. Vijay Mishra is one of the first scholars to differentiate between the old Indian diaspora of "exclusivism" and the new Indian "diaspora of the border". The older diaspora came into being in "the moment of classic capitalism ... the movement, that is, of cheap labor – slave and indenture – for the production of raw materials as well as luxury items for the growing British and European bourgeoisie. The second, is the moment of late capitalism with the economic migrants and refugees entering the metropolitan centres of the ex-Empire as well as the New World and Australasia" ("Diasporas and the Art of Impossible Mourning", 26). Sudesh Mishra's *Diaspora Criticism* (2006) theorizes on the changing trends in 'diaspoetics', according to him, critical studies on diaspora can be clubbed in three different categories which are named "The Scene of Dual Territoriality", "The Scene of Situational Laterality" and "The Scene

of Archival Specificity". The first 'scene' emphasizes the dichotomy of 'home' and 'abroad' and Mishra deduces that this approach to diaspora is redundant. The second 'scene' looks at the diasporic community as being open to multiple influences and identities simultaneously, while the last approach is doubtful of a universal theory of diaspora and demands a specific theory on a particular diasporic community evolved through rigorous archival study.

In his essay "The Vernacular Cosmopolitan" (2000)the postcolonial scholar Homi Bhabha explains, "It is double life... that makes them 'vernacular cosmopolitans', translating between cultures, renegotiating traditions, from a position, where 'locality' insists on its own terms, while entering into large national and societal conversations ... .Vernacular Cosmopolitans are compelled to make a tryst with cultural translation as an act of survival. Their specific and local histories, often threatened or repressed, are inserted in 'between the lines' of dominant cultural practices" (134). Many scholars theorizing on diaspora derive from the concept of 'third space' as explicated by Bhabha. He explains, "The non-synchronous temporality of global and national cultures opens up a cultural space – a third space – where the negotiation of incommensurable differences creates a tension peculiar to borderline existences" (*The Location of Culture*,218). Avtar Brah in *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (1996) coins the term 'diaspora space'. According to her, the term designates the terrain in which, "multiple subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed or disavowed; where the permitted and the prohibited perpetually interrogate; and where the accepted and the transgressive imperceptibly mingle even while these syncretic forms may be disclaimed in the name of purity and tradition" (208). Her notion of diaspora space is that of a space populated with the "entanglement of the genealogies of dispersal with those of

'staying put'" which includes both "those who have migrated and their descendants ... [and] those constructed and represented as indigenous" (181). Vijay Mishra coins a similar term 'diasporic imaginary' in the essay of the same title to refer to "any ethnic enclave in the nation-state that defines itself, consciously, unconsciously or because of the political self-interest of a racialized nation-state as a group of that lives in displacement" ("The Diasporic Imaginary", 243). Sura P.Rath in "Home(s) Abroad: Diasporic Identities in Third Spaces" (2009) probes into his subjective position and views himself as a person belonging to two cultures simultaneously. He theorizes on Bhabha's 'third space' and deduces that though his land of origin and land of adoption are far apart, they merge seamlessly in his body and mind. C.Vijayashree in "Survival as an Ethnic: South Asian Immigrant Women's Writing" (2001) posits:

> Migration and relocation may be better conceptualized as cases of rupture and disjunctive crisis. This rupture and crisis acquire an extra edge of urgency and poignancy in the case of female immigrants because for them diasporic living entails double distancing/double exile. Women are born into an "expatriate" state (the term expatriation is itself conjoined to patriarchy) and they are expatriated in patria, hence a geographical movement away from home to an alien country is only an accentuation of gendered exile that they have all along borne. (131)

She observes that on the one hand immigration/exile increases woman's sense of alienation and on the other it is viewed as an escape from patriarchal traditions. This "criss-cross" of responses to immigration is captured in the Indian diasporic women's writings. Ketu Katrak in her pioneering essay, "South Asian American Literature" (1997) maintains that this category "does not indicate a monolithic

whole, but rather a collection of differences that are often more compelling and significant than any similarities" (192-193). Susan Koshy in her seminal essay on Asian American Literature interrogates the changing trends and meanings of this literary canon. According to her, "Asian American literature inhabits the highly unstable temporality of the 'about-to-be', its meanings continuously reinvented after the arrival of new groups of immigrants and the enactment of legislative changes" (315).

There is no dearth of scholarly or critical work on Bharati Mukherjee's writings. One of the most significant studies was published by Fakrul Alam. He delineates the life and works of Mukherjee and posits a juxtaposition between her life in North American and her phase as a creative writer. According to Alam, Mukherjee's first phase is that of an exile, the second phase has "aloofness of expatriation" while the third phase has "exuberance of immigration". Alam even mentions a fourth and a continuing stage in Mukherjee's writing career, where she seems to reconcile her Indian heritage with her American identity, hence this phase is called "a hunger for connectedness" (10-11). R. K. Dhawan has edited *The Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee : A Critical Symposium* (1997) a collection of essays analyzing various aspects of Mukherjee's fictional works. Nagendra Kumar studies works of Mukherjee from a cultural perspective, and has also categorized Mukherjee's writings into the stages of expatriation, transition and immigration. Other than these books there are several essays and scholarly articles on Mukherjee's works, of these Patricia Sharmani Gabriel's "'Between Mosaic and Melting Pot': Negotiating Multiculturalism and Cultural Citizenship in Bharati Mukherjee's Narratives of Diaspora" (2005) is of special mention. According to Gabriel, Mukherjee's "literary discourse on nationalism and multiculturalism,...does

engage with the complexities of national narratives to offer a negotiation that moves beyond a simple acceptance of dominant definitions of national and cultural identity." Most of the critical articles look at the female protagonists, cultural conflict and violence in Mukherjee's works but there has been no study analysing food images in her works. The present study proposes to address this lacuna in the corpus of scholarly and critical works on Mukherjee.

After being awarded with Pulitzer prize, there has been a plethora of critical works on Jhumpa Lahiri's fictional works. One of the first book length studies was published by Indira Nityanandam which analyses various aspects of Lahiri's works. Suman Bala's edited volume *Jhumpa Lahiri: The Master Storyteller: A Critical Response to* Interpreter of Maladies (2002) is a collection of scholarly essays on Lahiri's fiction. Judith Caesar's essay "American Spaces in the Fiction of Jhumpa Lahiri" (2005) probes into the creative use of spaces in Lahiri's short stories. More and more scholarly essays are published on Lahiri which explore the identity conflict of her characters. Asha Choubey's "Food as Metaphor in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*" (2001) is one of the first essays which explores Lahiri's predilection with food. Irma Maini's "The Politics of Home and Food in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*" (2007) looks at the interplay of home and abroad through food in Lahiri's short stories. However, till date there has been no study analyzing the culinary images encompassing both her short story collection and her debut novel.

Of the three writers selected for this study, Divakaruni has attracted least attention from literary critics and scholars. Consequently, there has been no book length study on her writings so far. However, several articles have been published on her writings and scholars like Somdatta Mandal , Sanjukta Dasgupta, Urbashi Barat,

Monika Fludernik have studied and analyzed Divakaruni's works from differing points of view. Domergue's informative essay on *The Mistress of Spices* studies the protagonist and her journey from the spice store into freedom in America. Other than numerous reviews, there have been no scholarly articles/essays on *Queen of Dreams.* Anita Mannur explores the trope of food in the Indian American texts in which she assays to establish that cooking, shopping and consuming are gendered and racialized practices in her essay "Culinary Fictions" (2005). Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices* is one of the texts analyzed by Mannur in the essay. Although she contends that food is full of interpretative possibilities in Asian American studies, she thinks that food writing is the least coercive and harmless intervention possible by the ethnic marginalia in America. She points out that due to the use of magical realist technique in Divakaruni's novel the 'messy' issues of immigrant problems are concealed and hence, the novel "dilutes the stench of the unsavory stories with the affective overflow of the aromas and passions of Indian spices" (105). She posits that "the text enacts a version of what we might think of as palatable multiculturalism: those narratives that are messy and complicated, those narratives that signal the ways in which Indian American characters are bound up with matters of race, class and gender, give way to something less indigestible and more palatable" (105).

Somdatta Mandal in her essay " 'Oh Calcutta!' The New Bengal Movement in Diasporic Indian English Fiction" (2007) succinctly summarizes the life and works of diasporic Bengali writers and the elements of 'Bengaliness' espoused in their writings. This article includes the three authors selected for this study. Unlike Mannur, Mandal seems to hail Divakaruni for discarding footnotes to explain Bengali words and phrases in her later writings. Sanjukta Dasgupta's "Locating

'Home' in a Liminal Space: Longing and Belonging in the Fiction of 'Bengali' American Women Writers" (2007) studies selected works of Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Jhumpa Lahiri. According to her the three writers "have inexplicable and often inextricable links with Bengali culture, specifically with the urban middle-class culture of Kolkata ... .They situate themselves not out of place but definitely in a space in-between –that is, a liminal space –which is often a tense locus with potential for both confrontation and harmony" (84). Dasgupta wonders about the appropriate tag she could address these writers and confesses that she cannot choose between the terms "Bengali –American" or "American –Bengali".

The critical works mentioned above are indicative of the scholarship both in cultural studies and literary studies in this fast emerging field of food fiction. Also, as we have observed, there has been voluminous scholarship on diasporic writing in general, on the works of Bharati Mukherjee, to some extent on Jhumpa Lahiri, and to a lesser extent on Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, but by and large there has been no study yet, comprising the selected six novels and the interrelation of food and identity. The proposed study is thus a necessary intervention that will add to the present corpus of work by exploring the new facet of the intersection between food study and diasporic writing by drawing upon the existing scholarship.

The present research analyzes the selected fictional writings of three women of the Indian diaspora settled in the United States by exploring the different ways in which identity is displayed and negotiated through culinary images. All the three women writers, viz. Bharati Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni are American citizens but have their origins in India, and to be precise in Bengal. In their fiction they introspect the meaning of being an Indian immigrant in America. Their writings revolve around the theme of cultural conflict, the amalgam

of the traditional and the modern, and the hybridized identity in the American scenario. Bharati Mukherjee in her *Wife* and *Jasmine* interrogates and to an extent celebrates the new space given to Indian women in the new world. This celebration is projected in the novel through culinary images; the protagonists Jasmine and Dimple along with their newly formed identities discover a new kind of cooking, Dimple follows American recipes while Jasmine combines ingredients of the east with the west and creates a hybrid genre. Jhumpa Lahiri is a Bengali born in England and brought up in America, she writes about the issue of identity and adjustments in America. The stories featured in Lahiri's *Interpreters of Maladies*, aptly subtitled "stories of Bengal, Boston and beyond", are connected with each other through intercontinental food imageries. Even her novel *The Namesake* explores the new meanings of being Indian in America; food binds the family and the Bengali community together in their nostalgia for the lost life and their hopes for the future in the new land. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices* is about an old woman who runs a spice store in America, her knowledge of spices and their magical powers heal the immigrant Asian community in America. *The Queen of Dreams* is about an Indian restaurant in the suburbs of America surviving a threat by an American food chain giant. In this novel the male protagonist cooks and brings about a communal affiliation amongst the non-white population of the suburb in the post "9/11" attacks. All the six works of fiction taken up for this study explore different aspects of identity formation and identity crises and moreover, various stages of identity formation are displayed through culinary images. Mukherjee and Divakaruni have a wide gamut of fictional and non-fictional writings to their credit, while Lahiri has three major fictional works published so far. However these six texts were selected for this study because of the density of the recurrence of culinary

images in these works. Amongst Mukherjee's fiction, *Wife* and *Jasmine* were the richest texts insofar as culinary images are concerned. Divakaruni's fictional world is full of gastronomic imageries and magical elements. As there were similarities in the protagonists of *The Mistress of Spices* and *Queen of Dreams* as well as the manner in which magical realism was combined with culinary images, the study incorporated these novels. Lahiri's latest short story collection *Unaccustomed Earth* was published as late as 2008, and thus it was difficult to include it in this study. Moreover, a balance in the fictional representation of each author was maintained by selected two texts by each of them.

This study repeatedly refers to culinary 'images', thus it is important to clarify that the term 'image' has been used in its broadest sense. M.H. Abrams mentions that 'imagery' is a very ambiguous term, the first meaning "is used to signify all the objects and qualities of sense perception referred to in a poem or other work of literature, whether by literal description, by allusion, or in the analogues used in its similes and metaphors" (79) the second is "used more narrowly, to signify only descriptions of visible objects and scenes, especially if the description is vivid and particularized..." (79) and the third is "used to signify figurative language, especially the vehicles of metaphors and similes" (80). This study encompasses all the connotations of 'imagery' as delineated by Abrams while analyzing the culinary images in the texts. Also, food, the protean image takes on different dimensions as it interchangeably becomes symbol, metaphor, metonym etc. According to Terry Eagleton eating and speaking "continuously cross over in metaphorical exchange" (207) and so it is possible to extend this and assume that language and food also cross over in metaphorical exchange. And this study also analyses the intersection of language and food at several junctures.

The study contends that the domestic domain allotted to women since centuries empowers them and enables them to cross over the strictures imposed by the patriarchy. The protagonists portrayed in all the texts symbolize maimed power given to females over the centuries. In the traditional world order the only power allotted to women was the kitchen; and food the only medium to exercise that power. According to Malashri Lal women and women's writing in India are governed by the paradigm of the "law of the threshold":

> It denotes a strong sense of that which is "inside" and that which is "out there". The threshold is a real and symbolic bar marking a critical transition. Traditionally men have ignored the barrier and partaken of both worlds whereas for women, a step over the bar is an act of transgression. Having committed the act a woman may never re-enter the designated conventional space except by public "confession" and must otherwise live in the "outer world" by her irretrievable choice. The "law" allows multiple existences for men, a single for women, and women have long been complicit is such gendered roles. As has been pointed out by sociologists, the term "Griha-Lakshmi" cunningly juxtaposes woman's "deification" and her confinement in domesticity. (188)

The fictional works selected for this study foreground the tug of war between the 'inside' and the 'outside'. The 'inside' refers either to the place of origins or to the kitchen and the 'outside' means the place of adoption, i.e. America or the realm outside the house. The study observes that all the main characters become power figures through the idiom of kitchen and cookery. All of them have to leave the domestic domain and enter the outside world, where they fare well. They all "cross

the threshold" to re-enter the domestic domain. Spices and food empower them. The semiotics of the kitchen enables the characters to come to terms with the cultural alienation. It provides a protective refuge from the seemingly hostile world of America. The immigrants' kitchens become the familiar domain, where producing a particular kind of cuisine reaffirm their cultural identity. The family meals in immigrant scenario not only establish the importance of family structure, but also perpetuate the ethnic identity through repeated renderings. In the selected texts, the women characters trace their journey into America through the agency of food. They do not disown the domestic arena, but expand their access into a restricted domain of the 'outside'. To reiterate Mcfeeley's assertion, they do not lose their kitchen to keep their freedom, but venture into the outside world through the mediation of the inside world.

The study is divided into five chapters. Besides the "Introduction" and "Conclusion", the other three chapters will be devoted to the study of each of the selected authors. Hence, the chapters II, III and IV are devoted to an indepth study of the selected texts of Bharati Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni respectively.

Chapter Two "Brewing Body and Food in Bharati Mukherjee" highlights the nexus between food and body and its eventual decay to implicate the process of assimilation of the immigrant community in the U.S in Mukherjee's selected writings. Mukherjee, the eldest of the three writers taken up for this study, is vehement about her identity assertion. She refuses to be addressed as an Asian-American writer or a writer of the Indian diaspora, but wants to be considered as an American writer. Her characters are mostly women who wish to break through their constricting lives and venture into the unknown world, as in the Bildungsroman

tradition. Both *Wife* and *Jasmine* document the trajectory of female protagonists in America and the resulting change in their identities.

Mukherjee has an equivocal stand on food and cookery. She neither upholds it nor does she deride it overtly but constantly exploits the paradigm of food, body and decay. *Wife* and *Jasmine* are replete with images of decay and violence. This chapter contends that the decay and violence is symptomatic of the sudden rupture of identity the immigrants face in their sojourn from the old world to the new. They transmutate their selves in order to assimilate into the American mainstream. This violent social mobility necessitates destruction of the old self and reconstruction of a new identity and this painful phenomenon gives rise to violent images. The food images presented in the works as opposed to the images of decay and violence seem to have a different function. The food images become symptomatic of the immigrant's rhetoric of hope. Food becomes the trope of non-coercive assimilation, and the study depicts that Jasmine and Dimple both cook elaborate Indian dishes so that they be recognized and appreciated by the 'real' Americans or 'sahibs' in case of Dimple. On the one hand Mukherjee foregrounds kitchen as the domain which perpetuates the identity of immigrant subjects which act as a shield from the cultural hegemony of America and on the other hand, she portrays the same space as a traditional site of women's subjugation which circumscribes their development as individuals. Dimple in *Wife* limits herself to the confines of her kitchen but desires the world outside. However her deficient personality does not let her overcome her inhibitions about American society. Her neurosis accentuates due to the loneliness she faces in America. She feels alienated and all her desperate attempts to please others through food seem to fail and the novel ends with her murdering her husband with a vegetable knife in her kitchen. She is a nebulous feminist who is critical of

the patriarchal structure and is aware of the limitations of her life as an immigrant in America. But her rebellion against these institutionalized strictures is neither powerful nor successful. However partially, the domain of the kitchen seems to bring some sanity and security in Dimple's life. Her final onslaught is the result of her uncritical and unbridled 'consumption' of American media which increases her inner chaos.

The story of Jasmine begins where Dimple's story ends. Jasmine is depicted as a person endowed with above average intelligence and wit. As compared to Dimple whose only skill is cookery, Jasmine is foregrounded as a quick learner and a survivor. Her first break with tradition takes place through her marriage with the idealistic Prakash. Jasmine becomes an urbanized woman and after her husband's death she makes a very unorthodox decision to venture into the Untied States to fulfill her husband's dream. She is transformed into a new persona through a whole gamut of experiences in America. She uses the semiotics of the kitchen to support herself in New York. Later at Iowa, she uses Indian food to subvert the taste of the American populace she interacts with. She resorts to strategic exoticism for an easy entry into the American mainstream. In the end we observe what Mukherjee presents as ultimate 'Americanization' of Jasmine's personality. She elopes with a man she loves despite carrying another man's child. She constantly romanticizes the outdoors through her kitchen window and ultimately transgresses the domestic domain and sets out to traverse in the world outside. Hence, this chapter observes that the feminist rebellion which began with Dimple is finally attained by Jasmine.

Chapter Three "Eating at Home and Eating Abroad: Lahiri's Diasporic Palate" explores Jhumpa Lahiri's political implications of identity as signified

through food. Lahiri presents the Bengali Americans as diasporic subjects who reiterate their identity through the repetitive ritual of cooking and consuming Bengali food. In her short story collection *Interpreter of Maladies* food is presented as an alternative medium of communication in addition to being an identity marker. *The Namesake* presents food images as corresponding to the life cycle of immigrant subject – birth, childhood, youth, marriage and death is delineated through food. Further the chapter contends that *The Namesake* maps the complicated relationship of the second generation immigrants with the first generation as depicted through food.

Through the repetitive ritual of food consumption the immigrants perpetuate their ethnic identity – this daily rite becomes the crucial link between the binaries of home and abroad, the past with the present, the east with the west. Lahiri uses food as mise en scène, which enables her characters to merge seamlessly into the backdrop. Food is an omnipresent symbol in almost all the stories in *Interpreter of Maladies* as well as her novel, *The Namesake*. The discussion in the chapter shows how food maps the characters' journey to self-awareness. In stories like "Mrs. Sen's" food indicates, if not mitigates, the protagonist's maladjustment and alienation in America.

In almost all her stories of *Interpreter of Maladies* Lahiri contrasts the inside with the outside, and she establishes the difference between the world indoors (makeshift India) and the world outside the window, i.e., America. In addition to the racial, communal and cultural significations of food, Lahiri uses food images in order to establish the peculiarities of her characters. The stories "A Temporary Matter" and "This Blessed House" are about incompatible couples who obtain new

meanings of their marriage through food. "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine" is about a Hindu girl who reminiscences about the time when a Bangladeshi Muslim scholar visited her family for dinner. Food coalesces differences between two religions in this story. "Mrs. Sen's" is a story about a lonely Bengali woman who is alienated in her life in America. In the life which is lonely, monotonous, and more or less devoid of meaning, preparing fish seems to give some meaning to her existence. Fish, the quintessentially Bengali staple food provides Mrs Sen the assurance and security which her husband fails to provide. The stories like "Sexy", "Interpreter of Maladies", "Real Durwan" and "The Third and the Final Continent" showcase myriad significations of food in interpersonal relationships and identity formation.

In *The Namesake* Lahiri delineates the journey of the first generation and the second generation Bengali Americans. The novel opens with Ashima preparing rice crispies and flinching in disgust because it does not taste as it did back home. Thus in the very opening scene, the author establishes the rupture between psychological 'home' and the literal home. Food stands for the gap between home and abroad which cannot be fulfilled. Ashima gradually comes to terms with her loneliness through her culinary skills. She becomes popular in the ever increasing Bengali American community. She cooks her culture and serves it to her family as a palliative against 'Americanization'. Gogol, her eldest son is a typical second generation immigrant who fails to understand his parents' love for India. He rebels against his parents' strictures and is visibly embarrassed by his mother's cookery. After his father's sudden death he accepts the bland mourning food and thus accepts his Bengali heritage as an integral part of his identity. In this novel food is showcased as an aphrodisiac where the characters consummate their relationship through food consumption. The culinary mores of the immigrant community

presented in the works of Lahiri provide an insight into the daily conflict faced by the community.

While Jhumpa Lahiri retrieves the political meaning of being an immigrant in America through the mundane aspect of food consumption, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni reinscribes the significance of food and spices in relation to identity by connecting it with magic and augury. Chapter Four entitled "Food and Magic: Divakaruni's Recipe of the Immigrant Identity" studies the manner in which the identity of the Indian immigrant community is evolved through the medium of food and magic. Divakaruni capitalizes on essentalized images of India generated and marketed by the Orientalist discourses, including food and magic, for deriving a new meaning of being an Indian immigrant in America. Through food and other kitchen images, Divakaruni tries to narrativize about the Asian-American population especially, women of this community. Food and magic are foregrounded as empowering agents for the Indian immigrant community settled in America.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's writings are acutely sensitive to racial problems in America; and her novel *Mistress of Spi*ces and *Queen of Dreams* are no exceptions as they engage with this problem seriously and probe for a possible solution. The Mistress, Tilo, harnesses magical powers of the spices and uses them for healing the Indian immigrant community, while the titular character in *Queen of Dreams*, without her first name ever mentioned in the novel, is a prophesier who is trained to interpret dreams and forewarn strangers of impeding dangers in their lives. They are trained in their 'magical' art in a pristine, premodern space in India. Eventually, both women come to America and ameliorate several lives. They both rebel against the narrow strictures of their tradition and adopt a larger worldview. Both the women work at the intuitive level to aid people with the everyday problems

of their lives. In addition to possessing 'occult' powers, both the protagonists are also providers of food.

In *The Mistress of Spices*, Divakaruni utilizes the colonial connotations of spices to negotiate power in the postcolonial world. Spices strive towards making this world multicultural and multiracial in the true sense by hinting at a political alliance by people of oppressed communities. The spices are portrayed as nourishing agents which provides strength to the Indian American community to resist racism. Tilo and spices, both take equal part in the healing processes. Tilo's chanting bridges the chasm between cultures. 'Tilo' means sesame the spice of nourishment; hence this chapter contends that Tilo becomes a spice, a consumable for the larger benefit of the society. Turmeric brings strength to Lalita, a victim of domestic violence to leave her husband, cardamom helps Jagjit make friends, Kalo Jire helps to guard Haroun from the 'evil eye' and ultimately red chilli pepper brings about the total destruction of the city in order to purge its hatred and anger. Despite belonging to the magical realist genre, this novel is mediated by 'real' problems faced by immigrants in America such as lay offs, poverty, nostalgia, fear of deporatation, domestic violence, racial abuse, etc., which form the subplot of this novel.

In *Queen of Dreams* Divakaruni not only looks at food as a consumable item, but also as a commodity that has to be marketed and catered to accordingly for economically viable reason. It does not advocate pandering to the west's notion about Indian food but emphasises serving authentic food without any explanations. The ethnic food joint as exemplified by Rakhi's eatery is presented as a counter against McDonaldization of the service sector. Accepting and rejecting food is very significant in this novel. Mrs. Gupta dies within two days after consuming the coffee at the rival coffee shop. Similarly, when the manager of the rival shop wastes food at

the protagonist's eatery, fire destroys the kitchen. The novel is enriched with discourses on different arts, including dream telling, writing, music, painting and cookery. This chapter deduces that the clubbing of all these art forms along with cookery implies that the later is also an art form. Both the novels solder magical with mundane aspects of food to help the central characters evolve their identity. The immigrant population draws strength and sustenance from food and magic and furthermore utilizes them to arm themselves socially.

The final and the fifth chapter "Conclusion" reiterates the overarching thesis of the study. It proceeds to draw differences and similarities in the manner in which identity is negotiated through food in the selected texts. It justifies the relevance of this study and devotes a passage to the scope for further research.

In addition, the proposed study will consider the position of the selected novels as feminist texts voicing the cultural 'other'. The proposition derived from the textual evidence contends that cooking is an act asserting personal, cultural and gendered identity. A reading of the six texts selected for this study with the help of the theories and approaches mentioned above will help to explain the profuse use of culinary images as an attempt to incorporate the experience of women into literature. The study observes that the selected texts foreground food, making it the locus for the amalgamation of the traditional and the modern. Food becomes the contested site, giving rise to the hybridized identity. Thus the proposed study intends to prove that culinary activity is a tool for identity assertion.

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CHAPTER II

BREWING BODY AND FOOD IN BHARATI MUKHERJEE

> Food is our centre, necessary for survival and inextricably connected with social function...The prevalence of eating disorder in western culture indicates at least an insecurity about embodiment, the nature of being and the boundaries between the self and the world. Physical boundaries are clearly crucial to food and eating activities as substances pass into, and out of, the body. Uneaten food is 'other,' part of the world outside, but its status changes as it is taken in to the mouth, is chewed, swallowed, digested.
>
> — Sarah Sceats, *Food, Consumption and the Body in Contemporary Women's Fiction* (1)

In her path breaking critical work on contemporary women's fiction, Sceats interlaces the category of food and body. She underscores the fact that the act of consumption dilutes the boundary between the edible agent and the body. Further, the eating disorder that Sceats refers to is a universal phenomenon where individuals, especially women, of various cultures are victims of anxiety related to body and food. This section seeks to analyze the inextricability of food and body in the selected works of Bharati Mukherjee. Mukherjee operates at the micro level of food, its embodiment and its further degeneration mediated through violence, to comment upon the macro politics of gender and identity. This chapter proposes to examine the interpenetration of food, body and images of decay and its implications on immigrant identity in Mukherjee's *Wife* (1975) and *Jasmine* (1989).

Mukherjee is well known for endowing her work with rich symbolism and imageries and out of these, images pertaining to food, kitchen and consumption are of special significance. Many critics have delved on the themes of gender, ethnicity and immigration in Mukherjee's fiction but I propose to probe into the above

mentioned issues through the medium of food images. As mentioned in the "Introduction", Mukherjee does not unswervingly hail the category of cookery like the younger writers of the Indian diaspora like Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni or Jhumpa Lahiri do. Instead of upholding the domain of the kitchen as an empowering agency for immigrant women, Mukherjee presents it as a constricting space. However, she foregrounds the same space with all its subversive possibilities as a shield/buffer against cultural homogenization of the diasporic subjects. Thus, Mukherjee has an equivocal stance on cookery where she neither completely upholds nor entirely denounces it.

The protagonists of the novel discussed in this chapter are both immigrant women who traverse through different trajectories to reach America. Dimple and Jasmine belong to different classes and thus represent Indian bourgeoisie and the working class respectively. Despite the difference in class, both the protagonists Dimple and Jasmine mirror their maker's desire to be Americanized. They wish to transcend the life inside the kitchen for a more glamourous and adventurous life in America. Dimple cooks in her kitchen not as an artist, but as a meek imitator, while Jasmine has mastered the art of serving subaltern culture and ethos to the mainstream, but both, to use Malashri Lal's term, cross the threshold, and move on to different arenas. In Mukherjee's fiction culinary skills are considered as a relic of Indian tradition which is faithfully carried on by immigrants in America. Though Mukherjee attributes power to the women's traditional domain rather grudgingly, it is obvious that Dimple and Jasmine are linked to the kitchen which in turn enables them to shape their identity in consonance with their ethnicity. Mukherjee's fictional world is characterized by violent images, and this chapter will establish that the food images also acquire apocalyptic qualities. In addition to this, it highlights

the fact that food maps the progress and assimilation of the characters in a new culture. A brief note about the author and her works will help to understand Mukherjee's preoccupation with this theme in her fiction. Mukherjee's popularity made Nyman rank her amongst leading writers of the Indian diaspora like Rushdie and Naipaul, further, she has been honoured with the epithet 'grand dame of South Asian American fiction' by Sheetal Majithia. Mukherjee's fiction has been laden with several controversies. She has been attacked by Indian scholars for the negative portrayal of India and criticized by some American critics for her uncomplicated hailing of cultural assimilation. Mukherjee was born and brought up in an educated and orthodox family in Calcutta. After her M.A., she went to America for a creative writing programme and then moved to Canada after marrying author Clark Blaise. She explored her creative talents in Canada amidst the racial discrimination she faced, her first novel being *The Tiger's Daughter* (1971) which has a few autobiographical elements. *Wife*, her second novel, came in response to a question she asked herself, "What do Bengali girls do between the age of eighteen and twenty-one?" (Mukherjee *Days*, 212). It was largely decried by the critics in India for its alleged negative portrayal of India and unconventional depiction of the female protagonist. After her immigration to America, she published two collections of short stories, *Darkness* (1985) and *The Middleman and Other Stories* (1988). She wrote *Jasmine* in 1989, which is her most recognized work, about a protagonist of the same name who maps her journey from a rural India to America. In the later phase of her creative career came *The Holder of the World* (1993), *Leave it to Me* (1997), *Desirable Daughters* (2002) and its sequel *The Tree Bride* (2004). Almost all the fictional works of Mukherjee revolve around a female protagonist, often if not always, these females are *picaro* like figures who undertake a journey where

they attain self realization and maturity. Anupama Jain identifies common themes and tropes in South Asian American women's narratives and observes that they are in Bildungsroman mode. She maintains that South Asian American women's texts, including Mukherjee's works, "insist on female autonomy and independence...they demand that each woman should be able to select which cultural traditions she will keep and/or continue...they notice how many women across cultures need to move outside of families and official histories in order to fashion alternative selves" (132). Thus, both *Wife* and *Jasmine* document (mis)adventure of the Indian female characters in America and treat their trajectory as contributing in evolving their identities. As these novels portray the trajectory of female protagonists in search of selfhood, the progress of that journey is delineated through the medium of food and related images.

Mukherjee is one of the few writers who hails her Americanized identity uninhibitedly and proclaims herself a "naturalized" and voluntary citizen of America in "American Dreamer" (1997) and further proclaims:

> As a writer, my literary agenda begins by acknowledging that America has transformed me. It does not end until I show that I (along with the hundreds of thousands of immigrants like me) am minute by minute transforming America. The transformation is a two-way process: It affects both the individual and the national-cultural identity.
>
> Others who write stories of migration often talk of arrival at a new place as a loss, the loss of communal memory and the erosion of an original culture. I want to talk of arrival as gain.

She celebrates her unhyphenated identity by her refusal to be acknowledged as an Asian-American writer and proclaims herself as an American writer .She celebrates the new age immigrants "They have all shed past lives and languages, and have travelled half the world in every direction to come here and begin again...What they have assimilated in 30 years has taken the west 10 times that number of years to create." ("Immigrant Writing"). Lal poses several problems to the uncomplicated hailing of this assimilation. According to her, people cannot entirely remove their past and plunge into the future merely after being issued the passport (159). More importantly, she draws the similarity between the women characters depicted in Mukherjee's fictional works and the author, "Like her [Mukherjee], they shed their external connections with India, but carry a core of beliefs in the interior of the self against which all new experience is measured." (150). Noticeably, the lives of both these women are linked with food and kitchen, Mukherjee neither forthrightly dismisses cookery as a useless relic of the third world sensibility, nor does she hail it, but she problematizes her position on food. Neither does she uphold feminine virtue in highlighting cookery nor does she totally deride it in the conventional feminist mode, but constantly exploits the interplay of food, body and decay. This chapter intends to unravel her equivocal stance on cookery and Mukherjee's fixation with food and body and how it negotiates the identity of the immigrant, female subjects.

It is noteworthy that in addition to food images, Mukherjee has interpellated her work with images of decay. She uses scatological images to represent incoherence and decadence in the lives of her characters before and after immigration. Both the texts under discussion are replete with the images of violence and may be symptomatic of the sudden changes in the locale and culture in

immigrants' lives. Food, as will be discussed in this chapter, falls into three categories. The three different stages of product cycle are a) stage of production b) stage of consumption c) stage of ejection. Agrarian images in *Jasmine* belong to the stage of production, while images of cooking in both the novels belong to the second stage. Finally, the scatological images depicted by Mukherjee pertain to the last category. These three different states of existence of food are based on Levi-Strauss's famous raw and cooked paradigm. In an undifferentiated culinary triangle, raw, cooked and rotten are distinct, yet interrelated categories. The tripartite existence of food shows that food passes from one form to another and it may or may not be revertible. Levi-Strauss points out that raw food if culturally mediated becomes cooked and if processed by nature becomes rotten. One sees the relationship between apparently disparate entities of raw, cooked and rotten. One cannot ignore the images of blood and mangled bodies as these fall broadly into the category of decay. The images of violence and decay are not observed in the works of Jhumpa Lahiri and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. Mukherjee's preoccupation with gore and violence is perhaps a reaction to the racial discrimination she faced in Canada and her alienation from India. For Mukherjee, drastic change in one's identity is associated with the death of the former self. She believes that the violence in her novels is linked to the fact of the diaspora, the breaking up and scattering of the people who migrate to other countries. As she maintains in an interview conducted by BBC:

> Violence is very connected with Diaspora and the transplanting from one's original culture into a new country, no matter for what reason we've come to the new country, implies or necessitates death of ones former self or mutilation of ones former self so I want to think that the physical violence in

> my novels are really my metaphorical or artistic way of showing the psychic damage that takes place.

Images of violence and death which are rampant in both the novels seem to demonstrate the painful process of rebirth in America. Dimple, in *Wife,* celebrates the fact that immigration to America will give her the chance to recreate her personality. She undergoes the trauma of induced miscarriage as she does not want to carry any relic of her life in India. The rhetoric of hope which inspires Dimple's immigration is marred by violence, and it will soon be observed that images of violence welcome her in the continent. Dimple's deep rooted dissatisfaction with her 'being' and constant longing for 'becoming' makes her transition into America very violent. According to Alam, Dimple "can neither connect with the people around her nor give expression to her feeling of rage at her old life. Moreover, the novel tracks the violence building up inside and all around her in the North American landscape until she is driven to murder her husband" (37-38).She murders her husband in a violent frenzy triggered off due to her inability to change her personality (including her body) according to her wishes. According to Jasmine, immigration entails the inevitable process of a violent "remaking" (29) of the self. This self-fashioning is very painful as it necessitates a systematic erasure of cultural memory and transmutation of the immigrant subject into something entirely alien. According to Ketu Katrak, "the novel [*Jasmine*] presents a disturbing ideology of violence as part of remaking oneself in American culture" (211). Thus, Mukherjee's use of violence implies that the phenomenon of immigration is fraught with either physical or psychical violence.

Dimple is obsessed with her body and in addition to the images of her own body, there are images of mutilated bodies of mice, cockroaches, Dimple's gory abortion, her husband's disfigured body etc. Similarly, *Jasmine* has images of the rabid dog, decomposed body of a dog, bloodied bodies of Prakash, Bud, Darrel, the farmer, Half-Face etc. Contrary to the images provoking disgust, there are images which provide vicarious pleasure to the readers, viz., the food images. Although, these images serve diametrically opposite function and effect, they are interrelated – considering the primal relationship between food and body. Food sustains the body, further, psychological aberration causes irregularity in the intake of food, which is ultimately manifested in the body.

Mukherjee problematizes the category of cookery in both her novels. Dimple in *Wife* is trained in cookery as any average middle class Bengali girl of her time. She has been conditioned to please her husband by her culinary skills and cookery (though arbitrated by bourgeois utilitarian ideology) is presented to her as the only acceptable expression of creativity. Dimple markets her culinary skills in America and is appreciated by others, so much so that her personality is recognized by her culinary endeavors. She showcases American food before her Bengali guests and highlights her Bengali cookery in the presence of American guests. Eventually, her neurosis and sense of alienation accentuate in America, and she loses interest in eating, even though she cooks regularly to present a semblance of 'normalcy' in front of her husband and other people. Dimple's desire for a life full of glamour and self fulfillment increases and she begins to resent her kitchen and her home as her cage. In *Jasmine*, the protagonist is endowed with the survivor's skills, she belongs to a lesser privileged class. Therefore, she is subjected to the direct influence of American culture than Dimple who is protected in the shell of her Bengali ghetto

and home. Jasmine assimilates in the American mainstream culture to a large extent and celebrates her hybrid identity in the form of her cookery. The fusion food she prepares subverts the cultural domination she faces and helps her co-opt the mores of both the worlds. Unlike Dimple, she trusts her 'exotic' charms and markets her identity through her cookery. Nevertheless, in the end, Jasmine breaks through the domestic domain in order to explore the outside world. Thus, this chapter contends that in both the novels cookery empowers immigrant women to resist cultural homogenization, but it impedes their growth as women.

If Dimple's is a story which poses problems to acculturation, Jasmine's narrative is largely uncritical of acculturation and glorifies it. It must be conceded that both the stories capture the identity crises of female immigrant subjects in America This section will explore the overarching theme of the thesis, i.e., the relationship between food images and identity in the selected texts.

Wife at Work: Caught Between the World and the Kitchen

Mukherjee claimed that her earlier fiction was mediated by her own racist experience in Canada. Though *Wife* is based in America, it was written in Canada and captures the earlier phase of Mukherjee's writings. *Wife* is a generic title; it refers to Dimple Basu, wife of Amit Basu, a mechanical engineer. The story is about Dimple's marriage and the subsequent immigration to America with her husband. According to Anita Myles, the title of the novel is ironical as the protagonist is "incapable of fulfilling this role in the traditional manner, as the demands are more than she can handle, develops a mental disposition which leads to failure in marriage" (311). Her neurosis, which is already delineated, is intensified due to the added sense of inadequacy in her new life as an expatriate. Though not nostalgic,

she wishes for a life full of glamour and romance. Her obsession with the elite society makes her lose touch with reality, with the result that she ultimately kills her husband. In this novel, food is intrinsically connected to body and sexuality. Dimple's neurotic obsessions are portrayed by her cooking and her imaginings about her body. Thus, this section will delve into the connection between food and body and its relation with identity. As pointed out earlier, Dimple restricts herself to the kitchen in her lonely American house which worsens her mental condition. She lacks the clarity of mind to transform her work in the kitchen to a creative activity. Thus, the kitchen which overtly empowers Jasmine, does not seem to empower Dimple. If the kitchen does not empower her, why is kitchen the site where Mukherjee chooses to ritualistically end the novel? She murders her husband as a rebellion against the strictures of domesticity which circumscribed her growth in America and worsened her neurosis. Dimple wants to work in Khanna's shop of Indian artifacts as a salesgirl, but to her dismay her chivalrous husband refuses to let Dimple fend for herself. She resigns herself to her kitchen. But even in her mentally unstable condition, she experiences (albeit partially) the recuperative quality of the kitchen. Dimple is an incipient feminist but lacks the mental and intellectual ability to fully comprehend the ideology and to implement it. According to Mukherjee, Dimple learns to "ask herself 'self' – oriented questions Am I happy? Am I unhappy?" (qtd. in Alam, 46). Consequently, this indicates her interest in the evolution of her identity and makes her a nebulous feminist. But because she lacks the capability to comprehend her own self and understand the larger aim of her life, she fails to evolve. Thus, she is caught between her desires and reality, between east and west, her imagined and real self. Her sense of identity and self hood do not develop as she loses track of reality.

At the onset of the novel, we are told about Dimple's ennui with her life as she waits for her marriage to be arranged with a neurosurgeon. As no potential groom shows any interest in her, she is convinced it is because of her physical appearance. Thus, body becomes the locus of her dissatisfaction. Her preoccupation with her physical assets results in her consuming food with medicinal values that would enhance her beauty – mustard oil massage, ground almond, honey packs, chicken soup etc. In her woeful missive to Miss Problemwala in a women's magazine, she narrates her problem very vocally and cries out in desperation. Her frank objectification of her own body is not surprising, considering the prevalence and internalizing of the beauty myth in the phallocentric world as explained in an excellent study by Naomi Wolf. Dimple treats herself as a consumable object. She too, like Marian in Atwood's *Edible Woman* (1969), becomes 'edible'. Her fantasies and expectations from her life are unabashedly materialistic. She dreams of cocktail parties and expensive dinners with her neurosurgeon husband. The strange chest pain is the physical manifestation of her psychological yearning. Her marriage is arranged with great difficulty as the grooms' people are disappointed by Dimple's 'unbengali' name and dark complexion. But finally, Dimple's father makes them agree to the marriage, by assuring them about his daughter's submissive temperament. But later he asks his wife to administer "more whitening creams and home made bleaching pastes" to Dimple (15). Again, Dimple's body is under scrutiny by her future parents-in-law and so is her name. Marriage, which she thought would liberate her, constricts her and makes her question her identity.

By enumerating the mishaps that occurred on Dimple's wedding day, Mukherjee portends the bleak future of her marriage. She hurts herself while unscrewing the coconut oil bottle which makes her finger bleed. Blood is considered

to be a desacralizing element in Brahmanic rituals such as a wedding. In addition to the defilement by blood, a substantial amount of fish bought for the wedding feast is stale and has to be thrown away. "From the window of the bathroom on the wedding morning, Dimple saw crows and pariah dogs work through the rotten fish that had been thrown in an open dump in the alley behind the house" (16). This image of dirt and decay forebodes the future of this marriage. With irony befitting the situation, Mukherjee inserts, "It was a perfect wedding" (16). The images of filth and decay which are presented before the wedding succeed in prophesying Dimple's future, in which her life centres on decadence.

Throughout the novel, we see that Dimple tries to live up to the elusive image of glamour, but ends up failing miserably. Her attitude is exemplified during a dinner at the Kwality restaurant, where her husband tries to be close to her. Instead of responding to her husband's passion, she is busy thinking about the proper way to eat chilli chicken. "She ate large spoonfuls of fried rice and worried about the most discreet way of eating chili chicken. It was difficult to tackle the small pieces with knife and fork, but eating with her fingers, Bengali-style in a restaurant, seemed terribly uncouth" (21). Though she is aware that her manners are unpolished, she does not know how to appear refined and this obsession makes her numb to her husband's passion. In the initial stages of her married life, she gives up eating her favourite green chillies, but she resumes eating them when she suspects she is pregnant. She hopes green chillies would make her body "return to its normal cycle" (30). She tries all she can, to get rid of her pregnancy. She induces vomiting whenever she can, as she enjoys the sensation:

> She would sneak off to the bathroom and crouch in front of the toilet bowl with both elbows on the rim and watch the arc of foul vomit crash against the sides. The vomit fascinated her. It was hers; she was locked in the bathroom expelling brownish liquid from her body. She took pride in the brownish blossoms, in the solid debris of chewed cauliflowers and lentils that sank fast; she grew arrogant and possessive, resenting the flush that carried them away to some sea. (30-31)

The graphical detail of vomiting has a masochistic dimension. She induces artificial vomiting and enjoys the "wild expulsion from the belly" (31). Dimple who confides in Pixie that she indulges in sexual fantasies, though not of a "physical" kind (13), is never shown as enjoying a physical relationship with her husband or consuming food. Nonetheless, she enjoys vomiting and phantasms of violence and disintegrated bodies. Images of women inducing vomit are common in women's fiction, one of the most memorable literary instances is Tsitisi Dangaremba's *The Nervous Condition* (1988) where Nyasha, a rebellious African teenaged girl, vomits in order to defy her father's dietary restrictions and asserts her individuality at least over her body, if not over her life. Similarly, Anita Desai in *Fasting and Feasting* (1999) has depicted a white teenaged girl who does the same as a result of her racial hatred and in reaction to her mother's decision to keep an Indian student as a tenant. In both the examples, one can see that self vomiting is the process of subverting the repressive social or familial structure and upholding one's identity in one of the most private processes related to body, i.e., eating. This brings us to the issue of importance of food in life; according to Simmel, food consumption is one of the most private processes of human society. Even a shared meal from a common plate would have different eating experiences. Thus, food is an important commodity which marks the

difference between self and the other. Once consumed, its digestion and assimilation by the body or its rejection is an absolutely private biological function which defies cultural control. This makes food intrinsically connected to body and its processes. Conventionally, there is a correlation between food, body and sexuality; hence any aberration in this nexus shows deviance from the norm. Dimple's inability to enjoy food and her inclination towards sadomasochism shows her deteriorating mental condition. She is afraid of her pregnancy, she perceives her body as a "clogged drain" and wishes she could consume some detergent powder to cleanse her blocked "tubes and pipes" (31). She wonders, "If the [cleaning] powder was advertised as destroying rotting food, fallen hair, grease, it could surely burn its way through muscle, fiber and tissue?" (31). She resents her own fertility and is angry that no one ever asked her "before depositing *it* in her body" (31). For a brief period, she comes out of her façade of politeness and enjoys annoying her husband. She hallucinates about abortionists "who dug into her body in a dark, suburban garage" (33).

In order to depict decadence in the life of Dimple Basu, Mukherjee has deployed images of blood and violence. Dimple is "picking dead bugs and stone chips out of rice" (34) that is about to be cooked later in the day. Mukherjee does not even spare the daily meal of Dimple's household from pollution. While cleaning the rice, she spots a mouse on the floor and after a passionate chase, she kills it brutally and stares intently at the body, concluding that the mouse was pregnant. She also flushes the goldfish gifted by Pixie into the commode and chases and smashes cockroaches. This bout of sadistic behaviour helps her devise a plan to terminate. She skips her way to abortion, which makes her very 'abnormal' and some critics also call her 'unwomanly'. Noticeably, Dimple takes control of her own body and exercises her right over her life, which is denied to women. She cuts herself clear of

any unwanted bond with India, and prepares for her life in America. Instead of celebrating motherhood as a liberating and an empowering experience, Dimple resents its restrictive role. She is different and even revolutionary in her reaction against motherhood and she sees the foetus in her body as challenging her individuality. The truth is that Dimple is insecure about her identity; moreover, her own embryonic and stinted mental growth makes her perceive her own child as a threat to her life. Her abortion and vomiting sessions make her an independent agent who is in partial control of her body. But this rebellion does not have the makings of a victorious rebellion as this is the reaction of a misinformed, insecure female subject. This insecurity stems from the sexual and social subjugation of woman in the hierarchical patriarchal set up, where even the unborn child is guarded as the family's 'communal property'.

After the abortion she experiences relief at being able to go to the US without any burden and starts weaving imaginary roles for herself. She is conscious of the fact that a sea change in personality is impossible but hopes that America will give her the opportunity to start her life all over again. She is sure that in America she could mould her identity the way she wants but ironically, violence welcomes Dimple to America. The first person they meet in America is Jyoti, an engineer friend of Amit who offers to put up the Basus at his place. He is obsessed with violence and narrates the latest New York triple murder, where a man shot people for no particular reason at the soda fountain. Mukherjee uncannily juxtaposes food and violence at the outset of Dimple's life in America.

During the first few days of her stay, Dimple is very happy in America as she is amazed at the little luxuries of the country. She is fascinated by real Darjeeling tea

being served to them at Jyoti's place. Like Ashima in *The Namesake* (2003), she admires American sugar which was "beautiful, very fine, very white, without chips or ants" (57). The cakes made out of the mix are no less than a miracle to her. She revels in the visual images of hosting an elite party like Pixie did in India, where she would serve these cakes. Mukherjee's manner of highlighting Dimple's excitement with food seems to convey that for Dimple, people and places were like consumables and even America, with all its bounty, is edible for Dimple. It is only when she fails to perform or the place fails to deliver, her discomfiture is shown through her discarding food.

Her very first disappointment with America is shown through food. On their way back from the corner store, Dimple decides to treat Meena and Jyoti to some cheese cake. In order to do so she enters a meat shop and asks for some cheese cake. She is shocked when the Jewish shopkeeper shouts at her for expecting him to break his God's law. Dimple thinks he would shoot her, but he explains, "Nothing against you. Nothing against your people. But you see, the meat I sell means I cant sell milk, cheese, sour cream – nothing like that" (60). Dimple is mortally scared after this encounter and is nostalgic for the first time about Calcutta where nobody would have objected to sell things to her, despite the vendors belonging to different races and communities. America does not live up to her expectations and she too fails to understand America. Cheese cake becomes the site embodying the cultural differences present in America and India. Dimple could not understand the Jewish dietary laws and perceives this incident as a racist attack. She later resents the incident as being the main deterrent to her growth in America. She is sure that only if the cheesecake man had not "trapped" her, she would have had the courage to venture out of her house all by herself and would have been "strong and sane" (115).

Her cultural confusion always centres around food mores. She feeds chicken legs to Amit and consumes wings herself because as an Indian wife she is conditioned to offer the best share of the meal to her husband. When Amit asks if American wives eat wings like she does, Dimple is angry at her own ignorance, "She had no idea what American wives did and had no way of finding out...how could she live in a country where she could not predict these basic patterns, where every other woman was a stranger, where she felt different, ignorant, exposed to ridicule in the elevator?" (112).The seemingly trivial question about the food habits of the Americans upsets Dimple and her sense of dislocation intensifies in this episode. Yet another time she feels foolish is at Khanna's dinner party where she asks Jyoti what happens to other parts of the chicken, as only legs and breasts are served. Carving chicken is not a part of the American kitchen. Unlike Indian kitchens, they have no space for filth and squalor. However, instead of praising America for its day to day blessings, Dimple is amused that the Indian guests defend life in India. At the party, people glorify eating the Indian way up with fingers, and deride American etiquettes of using cutlery. The guest and hosts eat with their fingers and view eating with forks and knives as imitating "sahibs", a term used to indicate colonial masters. When a woman remarks that American chicken is fatter and tastier, old Mr. Bhattacharya retorts, "though our chickens may be smaller and thinner they taste far, far better..."(66) and Mrs Sen adds that unhomogenized milk back home was tastier "somehow" (66). Though the Indian community feeds and fattens on American wealth and food, they look down upon things American and uphold India turning a blind eye to its flaws. Dimple is the only one sensitive enough to realize the irony of the situation like her creator, Mukherjee.

Paul Rozin explains the development of food preferences, where the food from the 'others' is considered undesirable and attractive at the same time. He observes a paradoxical tendency in human food behaviour: the fear of new food which is called 'neophobia' and the desire for variety which is termed as 'neophilia'. (qtd. in Falk, 286). The link between neophobia and neophillia is showcased through the tropology of beef. Beef in India has always been the cause of contention between communities, as its consumption becomes the marker of non-Hindu peoples and cultures. For an average Hindu eating beef is blasphemous because the cow is considered holy. Beef signifies the classic 'other' who is lowly and impure and even capable of polluting through minimal contact. At Ina's party, Dimple is shocked by beef eating Hindus and is revolted at the idea of consuming beef. At night she could not sleep because of the psychological impact this incident has on her – she feels that she has the taste of beef in her mouth. Beef symbolizes the inexplicable fear of the unknown. At the deli, where she goes to buy cheese cake, she again smells beef blood. The immigrants suffer from a lurking fear of 'others' contaminating them and proscribed food is one of the easiest ways of contamination possible. This explains Meena's reluctance to invite the 'sahibs' over to her home. The eating mores of the American world will render Meena impure to return home. Nevertheless, the real reason, as Jyoti points out, is Meena's inadequate knowledge of English. It is worth noticing that beef becomes the ostensible reason for the family to shun Americans, while the real reason is the inability to communicate and overcome the cultural barrier. Sometime later, Meena who is fond of giving household tips to Dimple, advises her not to do the laundry if it is in the basement. She explains that women are mugged in the basement, and American men mug women because beef makes them "crazy" (70). Thus, beef becomes the site of difference; beef per se becomes an

impassable gulf between cultures. And so Dimple's tasting beef is indicative of her apparent fear and latent desire to become the other.

Dimple is influenced by the American television and dutifully notes down household recipes and home keeping tips. She is so affected by food shows and programmes on interior decoration that she speaks about furniture and food obsessively. Her desire to be sophisticated is reflected when she tells her husband that if she ever hosts a party she would serve food on the patio. "I would read up recipes and make water cress soup. I would do wonders with two carrots and a chicken. Do you know what I mean? Something daring and glamourous?" (88). At yet another dinner party at Meena's place, Dimple chooses to prepare only a salad. She selects the most 'American' looking recipe for salad and purposely uses foreign, and in her case, exotic ingredients to display her eagerness to 'belong' to America. She declares when she brings the salad out "If you don't like it, don't blame me, blame the magazine. I followed the recipe word to word" (91). Bijoy Mullick is the only one to appreciate the salad and compliments that it looks "very American". Amit refuses to eat the salad as he "could not think of eating crab meat, snails and caviar" (91) and his rejection of her food also displays his unwillingness to understand or partake in his wife's American obsessions. Recent surge of cookery programmes on the television made Nigella Lawson say that cooking has become a spectator sport (qtd. in Ashley et al, 172). Cookery shows disseminate sensuous pleasure and according to Ashley et al, endorse a kind of leisurely and opulent lifestyle (171). To a certain extent, it is true in Dimple's case as she enjoys watching cookery shows while she does not enjoy eating. Food shows like several other soap operas she watches regularly, are strictly prescriptive for her. These recipes and plots are mechanized formulae that she dreams of replicating in her ill equipped

kitchen and life. She develops an obsession for TV shows that is tantamount to reverence and starts imitating not only the recipes but also the way of life that TV propagates, including violence. Just as she enumerates ingredients and methods for cooking, she starts preparing recipes for suicide and murder too. She makes several gory plans to commit suicide and murder her husband. Similarly, adultery is so glamourized in American television that Dimple does not flinch from it, and plays by the clichéd rules of the soap sagas. Her caviar salad is inspired by television and Milt impresses her particularly because he could imitate and cook like a celebrity chef from the television cookery show.

After shifting to Marsha's flat, she becomes more lethargic and lonely. She prepares breakfast for Amit, and sleeps again throughout the day and wakes up late in the afternoon to eat frugal meals cold from the refrigerator. She eats erratically without any rules and accumulates rotten food in the refrigerator and the sink and also enjoys observing the graphic details of decayed food. She stops cleaning her kitchen and as a result it becomes a stinking inferno. "There was grease ring two inches from the bottom and large turmeric stains around the drain. Two coffee mugs, a plate with congealed egg yolk and partly chewed bacon strips and a skillet with waxy bacon drippings cluttered the counter top" (117). Even her leftovers make her depressed and remind her of her failure in the process of Americanization, "The stale curry smelled offensively of garlic. It made her feel trapped, isolated in a high-rise full of Americans who ate hamburgers and pizzas. She thought she might have been a better person, a better wife at any rate, if she could have produced more glamorous leftovers." (119). She associates the decadence surrounding her life with the rotten leftovers in her refrigerator. In a party, Jyoti remarks on Dimple's weight

loss and jokes that Amit is starving his wife. She loses weight as she could not bring herself to eat in loneliness. Like Marian in *Edible Woman*, she averts from food.

As a new immigrant, Dimple is fascinated by the American kitchen because of its materialistic manifestations like white sugar, cake mixes and ultra modern kitchen appliances. But eventually these appliances and magical mixes lose their appeal for her, and she feels too incompetent to handle American machines, "She was a pitiful immigrant among demanding appliances." (186). The American kitchen which seemed like a promising space with creative possibilities, stifles her eventually. Thus, unlike the protagonist of *Jasmine*, Dimple could not extract the full potential of her kitchen as a restorative site because of her neurosis. We are told at the beginning that Dimple is trained in Rabindra Sangeet but she is never shown performing music. Unlike Jasmine who creates a new kind of menu by interspersing the food of the east with that of the west, Dimple is creatively challenged and meticulously follows instructions given to her on TV or taught to her by others. She slavishly follows instead of leading, be it cooking or shopping for food. She confesses to Ina and Milt "I can't keep up with you people. I haven't read the same kinds of books or anything... I just like to cook and watch TV and embroider" (169). There are several instances when Dimple uses the kitchen as a refuge from the unsettling realities of her life as a lonely immigrant woman. The kitchen helps her put on a façade of docility and adhere to the normative codes of a married woman.

She resorts to her culinary skills in order to shield herself from the presence of Ina and Leni. Initially, Dimple sympathizes with Ina and Leni's feminist ideology but she is disgusted when Leni removes her dentures as an act of rebellion against conventions. The act of brewing tea temporarily shields her from the uncomfortable

conversation (with homosexual overtones) between Ina and Leni. She goes to the kitchen on the pretext of brewing tea, "The kitchen was pitch-dark and warm...She hoped the water would take a long time to boil –she had filled the kettle to the brim – so she would not have to go back into the living room until Ina and Leni had finished screaming..." (149). Dimple pours tea for Leni, and in her frenzy she pours the entire tea pot into the cup, thereby burning the latter. Ultimately, Leni flees the apartment with Ina. Tea and kitchen not only become an escapist trope, but also an object of resistance which enables her to relish her minor success story. Later, when Dimple retrospects, she is elated at the thought of the shock on Leni's face. Fakrul Alam maintains that "Dimple's bizarre behaviour is meant to underline Mukherjee's contempt for fashionable feminists, even though it is quite clear that she has committed herself to writing sympathetically of the plight of Indian wives from a quasi-feminist perspective" (46). The feminist critics have identified a dichotomous relationship between the witch and the angel of the house. Ina is the former who is presented as "more American than the Americans" (68). She is a foil to the overtly angelic Dimple. Ina is endowed with the qualities that Dimple yearns to possess but is afraid to acknowledge the fact. Dimple is mesmerized and scandalized by Ina's 'un Bengali' way of life. Ina is unconventional not only because she 'wears pants and uses mascara', but also because she smokes, drinks and flirts openly in the presence of her husband. She mocks at the hypocrisy of the Indian ghetto in America and is very forthright in her cultural alignment with the white Americans. Most importantly, she never performs any domestic chores and disdains house hold tasks. She is also intolerant towards Meena and Dimple for their overindulgence in what she considers as useless kitchen trivialities and is angry when Meena dispenses her culinary tips. She ejaculates, "Don't you ever get tired of household hints?" (91).

She is a stereotypical second wave feminist; who vehemently opposes the patriarchal world order and looks down upon the lives of Dimple and Meena. Ina's childishness and excessive imitation of the American mores make her undercut her own feminism. When Dimple feeds Ina and remarks at her scrimping, the latter retorts "Why is food our national obsession? Why don't we make more time for happiness? For love?" (95). Surprisingly, Dimple seems to have an explanation "I guess, its all that starvation" (95). Dimple knows that the scarcity and the material poverty in the Indian subcontinent make cooking and food related activities much more significant than in the cultures blessed with surpluses. Dimple's starvation is more psychological in nature than physical, where she starves for more attention, love and glamour and this starvation leads to her obsession with cookery. Contrastingly, Ina lives her life unbridled, she confesses that though she was like Dimple when she first came to the United States, she drastically moulded her identity beyond recognition. She trivializes food and cookery and anything to do with the domestic lives of women because she has unlimited and unrestricted access to the world outside. She represents the American opulence in stark contradistinction to the Indian scarcity symbolized by Dimple. Ina can successfully transform herself, because she can transcend the boundaries of the domestic domain. Thus, Mukherjee undoubtedly upholds the kitchen as a place of refuge from cultural shock; nonetheless, she implies that the true progress of a female immigrant subject takes place when she transcends that comforting albeit constricting zone and moves out into the world outside.

Dimple does not venture beyond her doorsteps alone, but the world outside forces itself upon her. Ina brings over Milt to Dimple's house and the latter strikes a friendship with Dimple over tea sessions. Milt impresses Dimple as he sympathizes

with her. He is the only one whom she confides in about her excessive sleeping and violent streak. Later, he pushes her into the kitchen where he prepares a chocolate mousse. The consolidation of Dimple and Milt's relationship takes place with chocolate mousse. Chocolate has always been linked with temptation, and here it heralds the adulterous relationship between Milt and Dimple. But it is implied that even with Milt, Dimple cannot have a fulfilling relationship. She goes food shopping with Milt, helps him prepare ham burger and tastes pork for the first time in her life with curiosity and fear "– the pinkish meat got under her nails and for a while she feared Amit would be able to smell it on her for days to come – and she ate almost whole one with mustard and relish, and waited until Milt had left before rushing to the bathroom and throwing it up." (117). Thus, to become the 'other', she tolerates alien food but she fails to digest her own otherization.

Dimple is obsessed with images of bodies: her own body before her marriage and her pregnancy. She is fascinated by Ina's athletic body, repelled by Amit's non muscular body and attracted by Jyoti's and Milt's muscular bodies. She could not bear to look at Meena's stomach during her pregnancy and is enthralled to look at the dead mouse and crushed cockroaches. At night while Amit is sleeping she examines his body and touches "the curves of cheek and chin, trace all dents, depressions, scars, probe the weakened spots until she knew just where to strike or pierce and make him bleed in the dark" (116). She enjoys the sensations of extreme hate and the possibility of killing Amit seems very alluring, so much so, that "Her own body seemed curiously alien to her, filled with hate, malice, an insane desire to hurt, yet weightless, almost airborne" (117). While she has pizza with Milt she feels secure because of his authentic American personality and decides that she would kill Amit and hide his body in the freezer (195). When Amit vomits after returning from

Meena's party, far from being concerned about his health, she is embarrassed and wonders "what sort of containers one kept such ashes [Amit's] in on a transatlantic trip; plastic bags or the kind of plastic box with tight-fitting lids that she kept leftovers in? And what happened to the bits of bone and organs that were charred but not totally consumed?" (167-168). She cuts his finger, when he surprises her from behind. Instead of feeling guilty, she is thrilled at the sight of the oozing blood and looks at her husband with disgust instead of pity. In Marsha's kitchen, she has sporadic spells of anger. When she is busy heating chicken in the oven, Amit stands behind her and confesses that he loves her because she is a great cook. Instead of feeling happy, her imagination runs amok and she fears his physical proximity, "if he were to come any closer he could push her head into the oven and let it warm 375° and serve it instead of the chicken that was cooking" (110). This streak of paranoia gives birth to anger which subsides because of bunny oven mitts which Amit wears making her laugh. She was "grateful that Marsha kept these weapons to defuse anger" (111).

Throughout the novel, kitchen is foregrounded as the site for the final onslaught, in the same kitchen and with yet another "weapon" she kills her husband for no apparent reason. Thus, she had created the pre-text for her husband's murder for a long time. The 'recipe' of her husband's dead body was ready in her mind for a long time and in one of her psychotic spells she executes it. The sharpening of the violent streak in her, which is a consequence of cultural alienation, may be seen as a kind of Americanization. Her guilt at having an affair with Milt and her hatred for Amit bottles up and she starts hallucinating while watching television, she sees a birdcage with a bird who has a face of a human infant inside the cage, "Not that it was uncomfortable: there was a bowl of water and birdseed and the swing was a lot

of fun, if you liked to swing," (210). This bird cage symbolizes the cage of her domestic life where her basic necessities like food and shelter are provided for, yet she yearns to be set free and the infant face may allude to her aborted child. She further envisions that a man (who resembles Milt) takes the bird out and kills it. Thus, Dimple is terribly burdened by guilt and confusion. Immediately after she has the bird cage apparition, Amit decides to check Dimple's housekeeping budget, he criticizes her for overspending and suggests cooking economical vegetables like potato instead of broccoli. She silently plans an offensive against her husband who was challenging her in her own domain i.e. the kitchen. She watches Amit intently and is irritated by the noisy manner in which he eats wheaties.

> She noticed the Wheaties flakes on the counter. And sugar –he always spilled sugar on the counter. It was one of the little things that irritated her. She thought how horrible to have to spend a whole lifetime watching him spill sugar on counters, how many pounds of wasted sugar that would add up to in thirty years or forty years; but he never thought of such things,... (212)

She draws her vegetable knife quietly and stabs her husband seven times on her "favorite spot", on his neck "until the milk in the bowl of cereal was a pretty pink and the flakes were mushy and would have embarrassed any advertiser" (212). Her mental derangement which begins because of her confinement in the kitchen, leads her to murder her husband. The most emphatic line of the novel is the closing line, "Women on television got away with murder" (213). The author with her black humour implies that Dimple has brought doom upon herself by murdering her husband as she would have to spend the remaining time of her life in judicial confinement which is worse than the domestic one. Thus, the "weapons" of the

kitchen, which could have empowered the protagonist, lead to her tragic downfall. The culinary idiom constricts the immigrant subject and increases the sense of alienation and shock despite offering momentary comforts.

From the foregoing analysis it is clear that the kitchen becomes the space which enables the protagonist to steer her life and mould her identity (albeit temporality) in America. However, her neurosis disables her to tap the full empowering and restorative potential of food and cookery. It will be observed in the section on *Jasmine* that food and kitchen become one of the strengths of the immigrant subject, albeit with some limitations.

Matar Panir with Pork: Subverting the Mainstream Taste Buds in *Jasmine*

Dimri's comparative analysis of *Wife* and *Jasmine* highlights the fact that the nature of immigrant experience faced by both the protagonists is antithetical. Dimple's life in America ends with violence while Jasmine's immigration is propelled by violence. As Dimri suggests, Jasmine begins her sojourn from where Dimple's brief journey ends. Thus, Jasmine who was created seventeen years after Dimple, is a result of a mature and a more confident author. Jasmine's easy adaptation is upheld by the author, and the character enjoys an iconic status in immigrant writing. Jasmine, as Lal observes, is identity in flux who is always "on the run" (146).The least focused part of Jasmine's personality is her role as a food maker in the kitchens of several homes she resides during her journey into assimilation. As mentioned earlier, Mukherjee has problematized her stand on cookery, which is well reflected in *Jasmine*. Jasmine enjoys the role of food provider and Mukherjee, despite her ostentatious breaking away from the native Indian tradition, does not make her protagonist forfeit the 'traditional' role of a cook until

Taylor comes to pick her. Jasmine upholds her identity and as Myles observes, she "emerges as a complete individual sustaining herself by her own efforts in a foreign land. Nevertheless, Jasmine's intransigence towards her native culture and upbringing acts as a powerful magnet for all men who appreciate and admire her Indianness and its adaptability" (312). What Myles means by Jasmine's 'Indianness' is questionable, but her observation that Jasmine attracts men precisely because of her ethnic identity is true. Jasmine admits several times that Bud fell in love with her because of her exoticness, "Bud courts me because I am alien. I am darkness, mystery, inscrutability. The East plugs me into instant vitality and wisdom. I rejuvenate him simply by being who I am" (200). But at the same time he is unwilling to hear stories about her past, "It's as though Hasnapur is an old husband or lover. Even memories are sign of disloyalty" (231). He can accept her exoticness only until it is palatable and does not disturb him. For him, Orient is nothing more than a soy-bean market. This commodified image of the east makes Jasmine cater to the Orientalist imagination which in turn renders her as a consumable exotica. In his essay Stanley Fish juxtaposes deep rooted multiculturalism with a superficial manifestation of multiculturalism, which he refers to as "boutique" multiculturalism and shows that a dichotomy exists between the two. To quote Fish: "The politics of difference is what I mean by strong multiculturalism. It is strong because it values difference in and for itself rather than as a manifestation of something more basically constitutive. Whereas the boutique multiculturalist will accord a superficial respect to cultures...." (378). Drawing on his excellent thesis, one realizes that Bud and Mother Ripplemayer et al are boutique multiculturalists who value cultural difference only superficially. On the other hand, Taylor is one of the most understanding men Jasmine meets, who accepts her as she is and does not try to

change her. Unlike Dimple, whose identity is marred by inferior complex because of her 'Indianness', Jasmine celebrates her otherness and capitalizes on it. She markets herself as the ethnic other, who follows a lifestyle not strikingly different from that of the mainstream Americans. She is adaptable and is happy to learn about the new mores of America even as she upholds some Indian inhibitions. While interacting with the Americans, she veils her real feelings and does not attempt to rectify their misconceptions about India. Her connection with the domestic realm of the kitchen best proves her adherence to both 'Indian' and 'American' traits and uses both to the best of her advantage.

In parts of the novel which are based in India, images of food do not predominate but are laden with the images of decadence whereas the images pertaining to cookery occur in Jasmine's life in the United States. This mirrors Mukherjee's upholding life in America and deriding that of India. According to Lal, Mukherjee has adopted an interesting stance in ethnic American literature, which is adequately exotic as well as sufficiently American (158). She also falls into the trap of essentializing India where she presents images of decay. The scenes are written with the all pervading presence of dirt, heat and dust. Jasmine remembers India and her past life in short narrative vignettes. When she goes to the river to wash the blood from her forehead, she is confronted with the carcass of a dog:

> The body was rotten, the eyes had been eaten. The moment I touched it, the body broke in two, as though the water has been its glue. A stench leaked out of the broken body, and then both pieces quickly sank.

> That stench always stays with me. I'm twenty-four now, I live in Baden, Elsa County, Iowa, but every time I lift a glass of water to my lips, fleetingly I smell it. (5)

When the narrative shifts to America, she is glad that she got away from the 'rotten' life that India could have provided to an underdog like her. This stench reminds her of her self fashioned identity which is indeed a far cry from the disintegrated carcass, as she asserts, "I know what I don't want to become" (5). Jasmine relates to and is repulsed by the dead dog, because of her awareness that in India, a poor widow like herself would have been susceptible to disintegration and decay like the dead dog. America gives her the opportunity to reinvent her self, as she later mentions, "There are no harmless, compassionate ways to remake oneself. We murder who we were so we can rebirth ourselves in the images of dreams" (29). Violence in her rite of passage gives her the courage to fashion herself. Mukherjee chronologically preempts Lahiri and Divakaruni, but thematically we see that while the works of the latter writers are filled with olfactory richness of Indian food and spices, Mukherjee makes her protagonist carry the stench of a dead animal across the globe to America. Thus, taste and flavours of India are not shown in a favourable light in Mukherjee's works.

It is interesting to note that in her attempt to glorify Jasmine, Mukherjee weaves the story of a rabid dog attack in India. The motif of predator and the prey is presented in the novel repeatedly. The dog, the mad predator, wants to kill Jasmine but, she being a constant rebel, refuses to be a passive victim and a mere consumable at the hand of the attacker. She attacks the dog with a nearby branch and the latter meets its gory end. Instead of praising her bravery, Jasmine is rebuked by village

women, as the act of defending one's self from the ordained destiny is very unnerving for them. For we are told that the village girls are like cattle who go any way they are led. Jasmine only partially fits into the girl-cattle image as she allows her uncritical transmogrification at the hands of her husband, Prakash. But she is a little different than others as she is bold enough to desire an English speaking husband. Her brother arranges her meeting with Prakash where she is dressed at her best and also wears a pair of sunglasses. This disguise liberates her and provides her a new urban identity. She assumes the role of a temptress and when offered tea in a proper cup and saucer, she imitates her friend Vimla and tries to appear confident by blowing tea after pouring it into the saucer (72).

It is established clearly that Jasmine is innately superior to other girls from Hasnapur because of her command over English and because, she "boiled the river water three and four times, when everyone else just let the mud settle before drinking" (45). Her sense of hygiene and her English language skills make her superior to others, hence, she is shown to possess non-rural characteristics, which make her fit enough to be an American. Even in the tethered space allotted to her, she nourishes the desire to become a doctor. Despite the ambition to transcend the domestic domain, she enjoys everyday household chores. Jasmine does not feel trapped inside the kitchen and willingly chooses the domestic domain in addition to her other 'roles'. We are told that she was an active participant in the female community of her village and entrenched deeply into the domestic space which is traditionally assigned to women.

> The work at home didn't slow me down. I liked doing chores. At dawn I pushed our Mazbi maidservant aside and boiled the milk myself –four times

-- because the maid had no clue to cleanliness and pasteurization. Just before dusk, the best hour for marketing, since vegetable vendors discounted what they hadn't sold and what they couldn't keep overnight, I'd do with neighbourhood women and get my mother the best bargains. The women like having me with them because I could add fast in my head, and because I always caught the lime and chillies vendor when he cheated them. In return, the crabbiest of the women taught me how to haggle prices down. She was a widow, and for herself she bought only half kilos of potatoes and onions (as a widow she should not have eaten onions); I knew even then I was witnessing permissible rebellion. (47)

With a group of mother figures mentoring her, Jasmine becomes adept in the act of surviving in abject penury. Not only does she understand the strictures of her society, she also witnesses the "permissible rebellion" operating therein. On the one hand, she observes her mother who wants to be burnt alive at the funeral pyre of her dead husband and whom Jasmine has to force feed, and on the other, she observes a widow who indulges in eating onions, (known to have aphrodisiacal properties) which is proscribed for widows. Jasmine understands that society operates in opposing directions, she realizes very early in life that normativity can be subverted, and at times, easily so. Her identity shows the opposing traits of an aspiring professional and a home maker. Therefore, Jasmine who planned self-immolation after burning her dead husband's clothes in an American campus can successfully switch sudden roles from Sati into Kali to kill Half-Face. The daily trials of her family life arm her to face the seemingly insurmountable challenges in America. To put it concisely, the domestic world comprising of the kitchen enables Jasmine to

mould her life in America. Further, the experiences acquired in the arena of the household in India help her to secure the position of a caregiver in Taylor's family.

Violence portrayed by the disintegration of bodies act as a propellant of the plot. Prakash's death forces Jasmine to immigrate to America while Half- Face's murder helps Jasmine to meet Lillan. Half-Face as the name denotes, possesses a distorted body which exhibits his violent streak. After she is raped by Half-Face she dismisses the idea of suicide and slays him. She slices her tongue and stabs Half-Face several times before he becomes a bleeding lump of flesh. With bleeding tongue, which decapacitates her to either speak or eat, she sets on an uncertain journey into America. It is noteworthy, instead of slitting her wrists to end her life, she slits her tongue. This masochistic act helps her brave the act of murdering Half-Face. Another significant fact about this destructive act is that the tongue is essential in food consumption and communication. This act shows Jasmine's struggle between thanatos and eros, the latter prevents her from killing herself while the former is exhibited by her temporary inability to enjoy the act of food consumption considered as a life affirming act. In her own way, Jasmine blocks her taste buds, thus food consumption is temporarily shorn of its pleasure. Furthermore, her maimed tongue circumscribes her from articulating the unspeakable pain of rape and the guilt of murder combined with the fear of persecution. The mouth, which is a locus of nourishment, is also the site of language generation. Jasmine's slitting her tongue makes her forgo all the functions of the mouth temporarily – she cannot speak and merely stutters incomprehensibly. She has to relearn to speak as well as eat as a result, the slitting of her tongue leads to a symbolic rebirth for Jasmine.

After murdering Half-Face she walks aimlessly and she is delighted at the agrarian scenario which resembles her village in India. "Fields on either side of the highway were dense with tomatoes, eggplants, and okra...I had travelled the world without ever leaving the familiar crops of Punjab" (128). She thinks she is in the familiar domain of farmers, so walks on the trail thinking farmers would provide her with food. In the same farm she meets Lillian, her guardian angel in America. She not only provides her food and shelter but also teaches her the mores of America so that she can pass off as an American. Her acculturation begins with food and clothes – both serve to disguise her real identity. Her first 'test' was to buy Lillian a Dairy Queen from the mall. Jasmine says, "I remember Dairy Queen as my first true American food. How it soothed my still-raw tongue. I thought of it as healing food" (133). Instead of being intimidated by American food, Jasmine is open to explore her taste options. Dairy Queen becomes symptomatic of America's partial acceptance of Jasmine. This is a far cry from Dimple's cheesecake 'test', whose very first transaction with America leaves her disgruntled and scared. In this instance cheesecake becomes the site of contention where cultural difference between the new immigrant with 'different' clothes and a mainstream American surface, whereas Dairy Queen soothes Jasmine because of her own eagerness to belong to the American mainstream. In addition, her disguise (American clothes, shoes and gait) helps her to pass off as an American. While living with Lillian, Jasmine tries to learn different cultures through different cuisines,

> They [Kanjobal women] showed me how to pat grainy tortilla dough into shape, and I showed them how to roll the thinnest, roundest chapattis. And Lillian taught us all to cook hamburgers and roasts, to clean toilets with cleansers that smelled sweeter than flowers, and to scrub pots and pans with

pre-soaped balls of steel wool instead of ashes and lemon rinds, so we could hire ourselves out as domestics. (134)

For Jasmine, (pan) American culture unravels in front of her in the form of food and she is an eager devourer. The attractiveness of American domestic chores fascinates her, she claims that the toilet cleaners smelt "sweeter" than flowers and washing utensils was also different from washing it with mud and ashes as in India. When she decides that she has been adequately Americanized, she goes to stay at the house of her dead husband's teacher, at whose behest Prakash wanted to come to America. After a pleasant cultural experience that Jasmine receives during her stay with Lillian, boredom and stagnancy engulf her life at the Indian ghetto at Flushing. She is consternated at the artificially constructed India. The food, films, mores and entire way of life in Flushing are dictated by Indian mores. Jasmine is expected to be docile and wear dull clothes displaying her widowhood, the past which she thought she had left behind stifles the growth of her personality. She loses her confidence and her English becomes worse day by day. The monotony of life reflects in her body and she gains weight because she indulges in cooking and eating. She grows fat for the American clothes gifted by Lillian and her bodily disfiguration makes her desperate to leave Flushing and venture into the unseen but promising pastures of American life.

In Hayeses's house, Jasmine enjoys her role as a caregiver, which she discovers is "professional, like a school teacher or a nurse" (175). She becomes a voracious learner and learns language and a way of life. At Hayesses's dinner, she "sat like a guest and only helped with the serving (and increasingly, controlled the menu)..." (174). With the increasing control on the menu comes the increasing

authority over the household and the housemates. From a caregiver she becomes 'day mummy' and after Wylie falls out of love with Taylor, Jasmine almost takes her place. But Sukki, the terrorist who killed her husband spots her at a New York park so she leaves for Iowa hurriedly where in a providential meeting she stumbles upon mother Ripplemeyer. Her relationship with Bud begins over lunch, who confesses later that he would have given her a job because of her mother's reference, but asked her out to lunch only because she was beautiful. Thus, food heralds a new relationship for Jasmine. She starts living with Bud and builds a makeshift family around him. After Bud's accident, her role becomes more of a nurse than a wife and she rapidly grows dissatisfied within the confines of her kitchen while Bud is away at work. She desires for action in her insipid life.

As mentioned earlier, her digestible exotic quotient makes Bud accept Jasmine, but Baden's community does not extend a warm welcome to her. In the county charity events she feels alienated amongst "Eggs, sausages, pancakes, home-baked breads and coffee cakes, jams and apple butter, cantaloupes, strawberries, and melons" (203). Gradually, in a permissible and legitimate act of identity assertion, she brings home cooked Indian food to such events, which familiarizes people with her cuisine and identity. By consuming Indian food, the community co-opts Jasmine along with her subalternity into the fold of their society. Thus food helps Jasmine get into the mainstream from her marginal existence. When Du's friend visits her house, he requests her to prepare the yellow 'thing' she bought to the Lutheran Relief Fund craft fair. Scott's "globey" (gobi) or Darrell's "motor pan" (matar panir) are the result of foreign incursion in the authentic cuisine of America. Also, it implies Jasmine's assimilation into their culture. She confidently cooks dishes from diverse cuisines and creates a hybrid cuisine. She mentions the "sacrilegious" (213)

smell of pot roast and gobi aloo, emanating from her kitchen and looks forward to eating matar panir with pork and gleefully reveals, "I am subverting the taste buds of Elsa county." (19). She defines her role in America, which is not very different from her role in India, "I still think of myself as caregiver, recipe giver, and preserver. I can honestly say all I wanted was to serve, to be allowed to join..." (215). On fulfilling the role of a recipe giver, Jasmine fulfils the role of an exotic Indian. She is expected to know Sanskrit, she is supposed to have conceived easily because of her broad hips, and she is expected to be economically driven even in her personal relationship. Her lunch with Dr Mary Webb is full of similar misconceptions – the latter speaks about her 'out of the body' experience and expects that Jasmine being a 'Hindu' will understand as she asks naively, "Don't you Hindus keep revisiting the world?" (126). When Jasmine orders pork chops, Mary Webb is disappointed and voices her disapproval, "I thought you'd be vegetarian," (126). Similarly, Mrs. Ripplemeyer essentialises non-American territory and asks Jasmine "Think how many people thrity-five dollars will feed out there" (21). Vijay Mishra rightly deduces that "'Out there' is the amorphous, unspecified terrain of the third/developing/underdeveloped world, wretched, undemocratic, in need of food...The challenge for the 'Out There' in the 'In Here' is how to make 'Out There' a body of people with complex emotions with more than just an unnerving single mindedness for escape via a Green Card...Jasmine is the 'Out There' in the 'In Here' geography of Iowa." (191).

According to Mongia, Jasmine's relationship with several men moulds her identity (218). Both Darrell and Du are attracted towards Jasmine, who acts more like a mother figure for them. Darrell grows herbs and spices especially for Jasmine, which she uses in her cookery. When ordering lunch, she makes sure that she orders

pork for the sake of Darrel's pig farming. Their relationship begins with tokenistic exchange of favours in the form of food. Jasmine feeds Darrell's fantasy as an exotic other. He states that he would like to invite her "in", and when Jasmine begins suspecting his motive but tries to cover up immediately by alluding to food. "I've been practicing with some of your recipes. Need an expert to tell me how I'm doing." (25). Later, when Darrell actually calls Jasmine to "save" him from suicide, she is surprised at the smell of "cumin coriander and turmeric" welcoming her at his house. She learns that he had arranged for a dinner and suicide was an excuse to meet her. Jasmine is surprised at the efforts made by him and retorts that she came to save his life not to "pig out". But the futility of this impossible attraction is hinted at by Mukherjee by mentioning the "bleeding" bottle of Mango pickle in Darrell's hands. He prepares matar panir with rice and over the dining table Darrell gathers the courage to speak to Jasmine about his feelings for her. But it does not come as a shock to Jasmine because she had already gauged the situation through the food, "The rice is crunchy. The tofu has crumbled. The spices sludge up the bottom of the pot...he's a shy, would be lover with a despondent face..." (216). It will be observed later that in the fiction of Jhumpa Lahiri food becomes an alternative medium of communication and proactively participates in the changing nature of human relationship. The smell and sight which could have been appealing for Jasmine turns "ghastly" and the curry is depicted so as to resemble blood. After Darrell's suicide the same kind of ghastliness is transferred to Darrell's body which is literally eaten by the pigs.

> On the road lies Shadow, the halves of his body practically perpendicular Straight ahead, a boiling sea of pink hogs: their heads, their backs, their legs jump above the open cinder-block wall...The frail man who is still slowly

> twisting and twisting from the rafter with an extension chord wrapped around his stiffly angled neck isn't the Darrel, would-be lover, would-be adventurer, who, only nights ago in a cumin-scented kitchen, terrorized me with the rawness of wants. (234)

Thus, we witness a strong nexus between food and the body. The dinner scene is transmutated into the grand feast by the pigs. Instead of food, the body becomes the site of disruption and ghastliness. Similarly, a farmer who goes out to feed hogs shoots himself and is found dead in the manure pit. Thus, violence is transferred from food to body and vice versa.

Jasmine feels connected to Du, her adopted son because like herself he has murdered his old self, severed his past and re-fashioned his identity. She feels the same affiliation with Sam, the iguana, because like her he survives in an alien country. The hardships and the scarcity she faced during her sojourn make her harbor strange habits, for instance, she stores water in every available bottle and container because she had gone thirsty and does not trust with certitude the surplus. Jasmine's trajectory from past to present, from the east to the west is actually from scarcity to surplus. From thirty acres of land in Punjab to three hundred acres of land in Baden, Jasmine has the first hand experience of bounty which is in turn celebrated by the author. Punjab, where she has to boil water from the pond or the hand pump to make it potable, is in stark contrast to well irrigated America. She confesses that the hot water faucets in America seem like a miracle to her. Along with the developed country side, Jasmine is impressed with the supermarket culture of America just as Dimple.

The schism between the inside world and the outside is a pivotal part of this novel. As mentioned earlier, Jasmine aspires to transcend the domestic threshold into the big world of men and commerce. Even while preparing meals in the kitchen, she desires to participate in the men's conversation outside. Her journey to America is a giant leap from her kitchen, but ironically she ultimately ends up in the kitchen, first at Vadhera's deemed Punjabi household, later as a caregiver at Hayeses, then as a part of Ripplemeyer family at Baden. She acknowledges with gratitude that the semblance of India which was maintained with such painstaking efforts might have been helpful if she were in a different situation but because of her traumatic past she seeks to break away from her roots, therefore, she could not be assimilated into the domestic fabric of the Vadheras. At Hayeses, Jasmine blossoms into a 'true American'. She is incorporated into the American mainstream only through the domestic realm. She earns her living as a caregiver and develops a support system in an entirely new country. She becomes rooted into the American soil as the household idiom empowers her and also provides her with the comfort and security that she needed. Gradually, she becomes afraid to venture out of the comfort of the household. She becomes paranoid and Taylor comes to her rescue and counsels her to release all her fears. Her fear of the outside world also can be seen as an unconscious desire to undertake an adventure.

Though she is inside the kitchen, her heart dwells in the realm outside – she spends more and more time around the window gazing at the rutted road outside and dreams of hitting the highway with Taylor. "I am in the kitchen, looking south through the dripping icicles. We're no-till, we conserve our topsoil, and we've got a phantom crop of dead corn stalks poking the snow in orderly rows" (237). When Taylor finally comes to pick her up, she is caught between difficult choices. She

clarifies "I am not choosing between men. I am caught between the promise of America and old-world dutifulness. A caregiver's life is a good life, a worthy life" (240). She chooses Taylor after some deliberated moments – again she peeps out of the window. The last lines celebrate Mukherjee's love for unbridled life, "Adventure, risk, transformation: the frontier is pushing indoors through un-caulked windows. Watch me re-position the stars, I whisper to the astrologer who floats cross-legged above my kitchen stove." (240). The old world manacles with which the soothsayer had tried to bind Jasmine are now ultimately broken, and his phantom is seen on the kitchen stove. Jasmine has defied his predictions time and again. When she plans to cross over to a different country she hopes that stars and their effects will be out of reach there, and when she leaves the threshold of Bud's house, she proclaims triumphantly that she will change her fate through the fierce assertion of her free will.

In *Jasmine*, on the one hand, Mukherjee celebrates the domestic domain and invokes the subversive possiblities of food for empowering the racial and ethnic 'other' and on the other hand, she seems to decry this category due to its constrictions. Jasmine resorts to culinary skills to make her visible in the mainstream society of America, but ultimately renounces the same for a life of reckless adventurer. A perennial transgressor, Jasmine who breaks the bondage of class and gender to reach America, transgresses her role of a caregiver. As she had mentioned earlier, "For every Jasmine the reliable caregiver, there is a Jase the prowling adventurer" (176). But finally the adventurer seems to win over the caregiver.

It is clear from the foregoing analysis that Mukherjee is equivocal in her stand on the domestic realm of the kitchen. She exploits the tropology of food and

cookery to empower her characters in a racist scenario. The protagonist of *Wife* with her limited mental prowess and neurosis cannot fruitfully blossom in America as Jasmine can. Both the characters adhere to this realm and try to exhibit their ethnic identities through food and kitchen. Jasmine markets her exotic identity by hybrid cooking while Dimple serves recipes of Americanization, but at the same time, they yearn to break out of the strictures of the kitchen and escape into the mainstream American life. Along with the images of food, Mukherjee has presented images of gore and decay of the body, this violence is exhibited in the food images too. The mangled bodies are concrete manifestations of identities in flux and the immigrant subject's fear of cultural alienation.

Mukherjee's stance on the empowering potential of the kitchen is different from the other two writers discussed in the following chapters. She questions cookery as a liberating activity for immigrant women but at the same time foregrounds ethnic food as a trope of resistance against the cultural hegemony of America. She clearly advocates transcending the liminal space of domesticity in order to undergo 'Americanization', however, she does not ignore the recuperative powers of the kitchen in the immigrant life fraught with cultural alienation. Thus, Mukherjee maps the evolution of her immigrant women's identities through culinary images.

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CHAPTER III
EATING AT HOME AND EATING ABROAD: LAHIRI'S DIASPORIC PALATE

> Food locates us. Discussions about place steer us homeward, and home inevitably leads to the hearth –the *focus* of the household … .Food is particularly potent as a place-making practice because it links the land to the hearth and the hearth to the heart through the mediation of produce.
>
> — Krishnendu Ray, "Meals, Migration, and Modernity" (171)

Ray's illuminating essay on food prepared in the Bengali households in America examines the relevance of food practices in the construction of immigrant identity. According to him, Bengali Americans are modern subjects as they constantly redefine themselves with reference to home and away, past and present, tradition and change (170-171) and their private food habits are repetitive rituals, reinforcing their identity in the new land. Jhumpa Lahiri, a diasporic Indian writer who rose to fame on being conferred with the Pulitzer Prize for her first work of fiction, is well known for her generous use of culinary images in her fiction. She writes about Bengali Americans and the daily challenges they face in their lives. This chapter intends to examine the personal relevance of food consumption and its significance at the personal level as well as the broader political question of ethnicity in Lahiri's *The Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) and *The Namesake* (2003). Further, it reiterates the overarching contention of this study that food displays and negotiates personal, racial, sexual, social identities of the immigrant subjects. The chapter highlights the fact that Lahiri narrativizes the ordinary life of her characters and presents seemingly commonplace images of cookery and consumption. Through the repetitive ritual of food consumption the immigrants perpetuate their ethnic identity – this daily rite becomes the link between the land of origins with the land of

adoption, the past with the present, the east with the west. Thus, Lahiri's fiction food connects places, imagined as well as real, to people living across the world.

Jhumpa Lahiri is a writer with an eye for minute details and etches them in her fiction with a cinematographic precision. She uses food as mise en scène, which enables her characters to merge seamlessly into the backdrop. The faithful descriptions of food preparation and consumption embellish the seemingly mundane plots in her stories. Lahiri, a second generation Indian immigrant in the United States, addresses the process of acculturation in her fiction, and her characters struggle with their identity shaped by the conflict between the longing for their land of origins and the desire to assimilate in their land of adoption. Food is a part of the whole array of things an immigrant is expected to adopt and adapt. In addition to persistent nostalgia which is presented through food imageries employed by Lahiri, food has a different set of signification where it problematizes and gives an added dimension to the rites of passage in an immigrant subject's life cycle. A substantial portion of this chapter is devoted to understanding the deeper meaning in the trivial act of food preparation and consumption in a person's life, through various stages of life, as depicted in Lahiri's fiction. The immigrant subject is fraught with many uncertainties related to her identity but the daily culinary act reaffirms her cultural identity. Furthermore, Lahiri writes about people who are either immigrants or at least affected by immigration. Thus, politics of identity is intrinsically related to her fictional works. This chapter will prove that Lahiri's abundant use of food images responds to and is deeply entrenched in the broader question of identity of immigrant/diasporic subject.

Somdatta Mandal and Paul Brians maintain that Lahiri's fiction deals with various characters' inability to communicate (18; 196); this chapter contends that Lahiri employs alimentary details as an alternative mode of communication not only between the characters but also between the text and the readers. Lahiri's subtle and restrained writing style paradoxically foregrounds linguistic excess, which culinary images provide. As Terry Eagleton remarks, "If there is one sure thing about food, it is that it is never just food – it is endlessly interpretable –materialised emotion" (204). Food and its multiple significance expose Lahiri's fiction to myriad interpretative possibilities. Metonymically, food becomes the third space, the space in between home and abroad. The discussion in the chapter shows how food becomes the site of domesticity with its liberating as well as constricting possibilities in the works selected for study. Furthermore, this chapter looks at the political significance of 'native' food for the Indian diasporic community in an alien land. At the personal level, gastronomic details, as we will soon observe, can be construed as the signifier of success, failure or placid complacency in relationship of the characters.

Jhumpa Lahiri is one of the young writers of the celebrated and contested literary cannon of the Asian American literature. Born in London in 1967, Lahiri then shifted to America with her parents at a very young age. Later, she published her stories in various newspapers and magazines. The title story of *Interpreter of Maladies* received the O Henry award and the entire collection won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 2000. Her debut novel *The Namesake* was widely acclaimed by the readers and literary critics alike. The tremendous success of her writings is indicative of the fact, as Grossman observes, "we're way more interested in Bengali immigrants than we thought we were." Further, he maintains:

> Lahiri is a miniaturist, a microcosmologist, and she helps us understand what those lives [of the Bengali immigrants] mean without resorting to we-are-the-world multiculturalism. Everyone in Lahiri's fiction is pulled in at least six directions at once. Parents pull characters backward in time; children pull them forward. America pulls them west; India pulls them east. The need to marry pulls them outward; the need for solitude pulls them inward. Lahiri's stories are static, but what looks like stasis is really the stillness of enormous forces pushing in opposite directions, barely keeping one another in check.

Lahiri's world is full of details, subtle wit, and the invisible but forceful 'pulls' mentioned in the above passage. While Divakaruni colours the mundane aspects of the immigrants' lives, by interspersing it with magic in her narratives; Lahiri presents myriad stories of immigrants and people affected by the migrant community, with a remarkable use of every day culinary images. She foregrounds the ordinary, by focusing on the food preferences, availability, consumption, preparation, and food longings of her characters. Food lies, with seeming carelessness, in the background of almost all her stories in *Interpreter of Maladies* as well as her novel, *The Namesake*. The characters oscillate between past and present, east and west, food grounds them deeper into the setting. Lahiri is hailed by critics for her ability to write without 'exoticizing' India or America, moreover, culinary images aid her to do so. This chapter will look into the significance of culinary images in the eight stories from her collection *Interpreter of Maladies* and her first novel, *The Namesake*.

Interpreting a Culinary Montage

In her short stories, Lahiri addresses the issue of identity and culture faced by many immigrants and those whose life is affected by immigration. This story collection provides variegated snippets of the lives of the Indian American community. The nine stories featured in this book come across as montages of the lives affected by immigration. The immigrant trajectory is the journey away from the geographic 'home' towards an imaginary homeland, and instead of developing uncomplicated rooting in the routed space the community invests in the ostensible symbols of indentity including food. The alimentary details etched out in the stories construct a tabloid representing the day to day lives of the immigrant subjects who psychologically exist in different time and spaces. The subtitle of this collection is aptly called "stories of Bengal, Boston and beyond". Lahiri explores the lives of people living in Boston, Bengal and in a couple of stories the locale is U.K. The "beyond" of the subtitle, is not just a geographical place, but the mental space of the characters. In "A Real Durwan", the old protagonist's past glory in the erstwhile East- Pakistan is far removed from her present impoverished condition. Thus, for Boori Maa the Edenic land of her past represents the 'beyond' of the cover page. In almost all her stories Lahiri contrasts the inside with the outside, and she establishes the difference between the spaces in the household and the world outside the window. She depicts the images of ordinary lives in her fiction, out of which culinary images stand out because of their meticulous depiction. Most of the critics comment on the significance of food in Lahiri's fiction. According to Choubey, Lahiri's status as an immigrant makes her more sensitive to the food habits of her community. And Charles Taylor observes in his review essay, "Food in these stories is a talisman, a reassuring bit of the homeland to cling to. Spices and flavors waft

through like themes in a piece of music." As most of the anthropologists concede - food habits are the last thing to wear off in the process of acculturation and assimilation. Women, who have been bestowed with the role of being preservers of culture, cook and consume food of their native land as it perpetuates their cultural identities and also protects their children growing in America from the allegedly malefic and undesirable process of Americanization. Lahiri is part of the group of writers fascinated by food because of its being one of the most typical markers of identity. In addition to the racial, communal and cultural significations of food, Lahiri uses food images in order to underpin her characterization. Food becomes a strong metaphor in almost all the stories. Ranging from the profuse use of food metaphors in stories like "A Temporary Matter", "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine", "Mrs. Sen's" to the stories with less dominant gastronomical imageries like "Sexy", "Interpreter of Maladies", "A Real Durwan", "The Third and Final Continent" to one with the least prominent food images like "The Treatment of Bibi Halder"; these otherwise disparate stories are soldered to each other through culinary images. As mentioned earlier, food images occur in all the stories and are emblematic as well as symbolic, performing metonymic as well as metaphoric functions. In some stories these functions coalesce and in others, a similar image could mean something different. An attempt will be made to analyze these images comprehensively and the syncretic aspects of food images in each story will be discussed.

The very first story, "The Temporary Matter" is about a lack lustre marital relationship of an Indian couple Shukumar and Shoba in the United States, which is conveyed through gastronomical imagery. The title comes from the opening lines where the emotionally distant couple is informed about the electricity cut in their

neighbourhood for one hour every evening for five days due to repair work. Thus, this inconvenience will be a temporary matter. Their marriage has fallen into a lethargic monotony in which neither of them makes any effort to rejuvenate the relationship. However, Shukumar still believes that this lack luster in their marital life is a temporary matter. From this point onwards the story is narrated by an omniscient narrator, albeit from Shukumar's point of view. We are informed that Shoba had a miscarriage six months ago when Shukumar was attending a conference and this had caused a rift between the two. The disfunctionality which has crept in their relationship is manifested by the food habits of the couple and the condition of the kitchen. Lahiri has drawn a striking contrast between the scenario before the miscarriage and after. Prior to her miscarriage, Shoba loved cooking and tended to fill kitchen store with surplus supplies:

> When she used to do the shopping, the pantry was always stocked with extra bottles of olive and corn oil, depending on whether they were cooking Italian or Indian. There were endless boxes of pasta in all shapes and colors, zippered sacks of basmati rice, whole sides of lambs and goats from the Muslim butchers at Haymarket, chopped up and frozen in endless plastic bags...It never went to waste. When friends dropped by, Shoba would throw together meals that appeared to have taken half a day to prepare, from things she had frozen and bottled, not cheap things in tins but peppers she had marinated herself with rosemary, and chutneys that she cooked on Sundays, stirring boiling pots of tomatoes and prunes. Her labeled mason jars lined the shelves of the kitchen, in endless sealed pyramids, enough, they'd agreed, to last for their grandchildren to taste. (6-7)

The overwhelming presence of food implies the emotional overflow in the couple's relationship. Shoba was an ambitious and a meticulous cook and their daily food included rich and elaborate chicken/meat preparations. Dining together at the table was a familial ritual. The readers are told that Shoba and Shukumar do not have meals together. She ate in the living room while Shukumar ate in his study. But again, Shukumar remembers the time when they used to dine together in the early days of their marriage, they were more interested in making love than in eating. There have been many studies which examine the importance of family meals; De Vault, for instance, argues that family meals are rituals of "producing home and family" (79). While Charles believes that "sharing of food is seen as indicating a close relationship" (101), he further states that during divorce petitions, one of the indications of separation is that the couples do not share their meals any longer. He argues, "The sharing of food is therefore something that happens within family households and is an indication of their existence" (101). In the case of Shoba and Shukumar, not sharing meals indicates they are in the penultimate stage of separation.

After the miscarriage, Shoba abandons all the house hold chores she was particular about in the past, and burdens herself with extra work at office and comes home late. Consequently, Shukumar takes over the kitchen and cooks for both of them. Lahiri mentions that Shukumar prefers staying indoors. As Kumar Vikram's poem goes, "A man cooking in his kitchen has a lot to explain to himself and his world..." (62), Shukumar tries to justify his act of cookery and persuades himself to appreciate it. The narrator maintains, "Shukumar enjoyed cooking now. It was the one thing that made him feel productive. If it weren't for him, he knew, Shoba would eat a bowl of cereal for her dinner." (8) After the miscarriage, they seem to

interchange their normative roles. This is clearly evident in their kitchen duties. Shoba, who was a server and a cook, becomes a passive consumer, while Shukumar becomes an active producer and facilitator in the kitchen. Far from resenting this fact, he enjoys his new role. While Shoba busies herself in her proofreader's job, Shukumar cannot concentrate on his research. He is worried about the deteriorating quality of his marital life. Lahiri, with her binary logic, juxtaposes the manner in which grief is experienced by the two sexes, by delineating the alimentary habits that aid the reader to understand this binary. Cooking provides Shukumar the solace that any mundane activity can provide, with the kitchen becoming a protective fold for him, and the domestic arena comforting him instead of constricting him. For Shoba, the world inside, the realm of domesticity epitomized by the kitchen, stifles her instead of comforting her. She moves further from her home into an impersonal space that her office provides. Her profession of a proofreader also indicates that her relation with the text she reads, corrects and spends time with, is relatively passive. It is a sharp contrast to her earlier activity of cooking in the kitchen where she gave expression to her creativity. In her neat handwriting Shoba documents her culinary endeavours meticulously including the date she cooked a particular food item for the first time and her personal omissions and exclusions from the given recipe, which were her own liberty with the text. This document becomes a memoir of the couple's life together. In her paper, Parama Roy analyses Madhur Jaffrey's cook books and maintains "By its very form the cookbook is the product par excellence of an age of Mechanical reproduction, one that streamlines procedures, calibrates time and ingredients precisely, universalizes a gastro etiquettes, and reaches a mass audience" (488). Interestingly, Roy points out the fact that Jaffrey insists on the individual traits of her cookery and convinces the audience that her cookery is a singular

experience and thus cannot be replicated mechanically. Similarly, Shoba rewrites her own recipe – interpolating the original text and exercising her individuality in a creative manner. Shoba in this story seems to have a dual existence – of an active cook and a passive proofreader. Further, she seems to be passively tolerating her marriage, when rather unexpectedly, she arranges for a separate house, and actively severs her marriage, quite unilaterally. Shukumar, like the readers, is surprised at his wife's decision. He feels cheated and angry. Earlier, he was fascinated by his wife's "capacity to think ahead" (6). But the same tendency sickens him when Shoba breaks this news to him.

The power cuts make it mandatory that they have their dinner together. Shukumar prepares the dinner with care – in addition to rice and rogan josh, he serves wine which he discovers in a rack. Shoba is impressed by this and then strikes a conversation with him. Then begins their game of confessions, which becomes a standard fare till electricity cables are repaired. One of Shukumar's confessions is related to food. It was during their dinner together at a restaurant that Shukumar thought of marrying Shoba. Thus, in this story, food heralds the relationship and also rekindles it. The relationship which began at a dinner is resurrected due to another dinner separated by time and space. Thus, food heralds the relationship and furthermore, is also a harbinger of the changes in the couples' lives, by surmounting the communication gap. Lahiri has successfully foregrounded food images as an alternative mode of communication.

"This Blessed House" is one of the most humourous stories in the collection about yet another incompatible marriage. Unlike Shukumar, who is "still a student at thirty five" (3), Sanjeev is a successful, rich professional who marries Twinkle

rather hastily. Twinkle is full of vigour and childlike enthusiasm, and as Sanjeev observes, "content yet curious" (141), which a matured Sanjeev fails to comprehend. Lahiri's love for the ordinary is reasserted in this story through food images. The story revolves around the new house they shift in after their marriage, in which the newly weds discover numerous Christian relics left by the earlier occupants. The pleasure that these relics give Twinkle irritates him, as he cannot enjoy paltry things in life. The very first specimen of the Christian paraphernalia hid in the house, was the white porcelain effigy of Christ unearthed with a bottle of malt vinegar (136).While Twinkle is filled with excitement at her booty, Sanjeev advises her to throw them away. Twinkle suggests that she would use vinegar in her food and keeps the bottle and the effigy despite Sanjeev's protests. It is interesting to note that, Sanjeev, the more practical of the two, cleans the house and even cooks daily, while the only thing his wife Twinkle is interested in is the treasure hunt in her new house. Even at the housewarming party, Sanjeev cooks trays full of rice and chicken curry, and serves *samosas* and champagne for the guests, while his wife, who is not interested in cooking, is the centre of attention with a crowd of admirers around her. Their cooking habits reflect their personality, Twinkle preferred easy to make food while Sanjeev cooked traditional Indian food:

> She was not terribly ambitious in the kitchen. She bought preroasted chickens from the supermarket and served them with potato salad prepared who knew when, sold in little plastic containers. Indian food, she complained, was a bother; she detested chopping garlic, and peeling ginger, and could not operate a blender, and so it was Sanjeev who, on weekends, seasoned mustard oil with cinnamon sticks and cloves in order to produce a proper curry. (143-144)

Her tendency to live out of the suitcase is consistent with her eating instant food, on the other hand, Sanjeev's worldly and staid personality reflects his eating habits and cooking preferences. We are told that he is an MIT graduate, and he fondly remembers his student life in terms of the food he consumed, viz. Mughlai chicken with spinach at an Indian restaurant nearby. He cooks all that is expected to be cooked in a respectable Indian household. Further, he cares a lot about people's opinions and does not like to do what is unexpected of him or unusual. Thus, alien things and alien food disturb him, he distrusts the malt vinegar and warns his wife to check the expiry date of the bottle. It is interesting to note that when Twinkle cooks tomato stew with vinegar, he is impressed and intrigued, and is disappointed to know that his wife did not record or could not recall the recipe of her singular culinary innovation. The readers expect Sanjeev to dislike the food because of the vinegar added, but contrary to this, he finds it palatable precisely because it contains an alien ingredient. The inherent paradox of alien food is that the consumer is both attracted and repelled by it, and so "He had to admit, though, that whatever it was that she had cooked today, it was unusually tasty, attractive even, with bright white cubes of fish, and flecks of parsley, and fresh tomatoes gleaming in the dark brown-red broth" (144). Sanjeev is also enthralled by the newness of the taste, his eagerness to procure the recipe is to harness the unfamiliar and make it familiar by repeated rendition. He suggests that if she knew the ingredients right, they could have served it for some party, and Twinkle with her characteristic carelessness speaks in between morsels that she would remember the ingredients correctly. Not just the vinegar used in the food, but the cutlery and other items displayed on the dining table are a part of the Christian artifacts discovered in the house. The serving bowl is kept on top of the Jesus trivet and the bread basket has a dish towel with Ten Commandments printed

on it. Twinkle responds to his unspoken question about these items, "Face it. This house is blessed" (144). This meal of Italian bread and vinegar stew brings about a resolution of their discord; he brings himself to appreciate his wife's erratic cooking which reflects her attractive persona. Only after Sanjeev accepts his wife as she is, can their marriage survive, and that ultimately happens at the housewarming party during the treasure hunt that ensues. He comes to terms with the fact that Twinkle will always have her way, and resigns the power struggle in a lifelong status quo. Twinkle's latest discovery at the housewarming party is a huge beautiful Jesus bust, and she requests her husband to allow her to display it on the mantel for just that day, but Sanjeev knows that she will ultimately have her own way and keep it there for the rest of their days together. This discovery of the bust at the party and Sajeev's acceptance of Twinkle is the dénouement of the story. Just as Sanjeev learns to digest the unfamiliar vinegar from the bottle left by the earlier Christian occupants, he learns to 'digest' his wife's unpalatable behaviour.

In both the stories discussed above, Lahiri highlights the fact that contrary to their counterparts in India, Indian American males work in the kitchen. Though the community strives to replicate the pattern of the family and household existing in India, there are some disparities which cannot be done away with. The same power structure cannot be maintained with ease in a new nation, there cannot be a clear segregation in the roles of men and women. The kitchen space becomes the contested site where the mores of the old, traditional world are in constant conflict with the new, American cosmopolitan culture. Shukumar in the earlier phase of his marriage is served food while later he takes over the kitchen arena willingly. Sanjeev expects his newly wed wife to cook 'proper' meals but he has to manage the kitchen because of his wife's disinterestedness. In both the cases, the men espouse a

particular gender code, which is partially broken and remade in the new country. These stories portray the Indian American community negotiating gender norms along with other 'adjustments' expected to be made by any immigrant community. While in literary and daily parlance we encounter countless images of women as preservers of culture, and their culinary activity is seen as the means to perpetuate the identity of the entire family and community at large; in this case we see men cooking not only to feed their wives and themselves, but also to derive comfort from the 'proper' meals. As will be observed in Divakaruni's *Queen of Dreams* (2004), Mr. Gupta surprises Rakhi with his excellent culinary skills, reproducing 'authentic' Indian snacks. But it is noteworthy, that only when the normativity of their household is disrupted by Mrs. Gupta's sudden death does Mr. Gupta, the man and bread earner take on the role of a cook. Hence, men here step into the shoes of women, otherwise deployed for preserving culture in their household, only because of the inadequacy or incompetence of the latter. From these examples one cannot deduce that all immigrant men work in the kitchen. Further, it is important to consider the correlation between the time spent by the family in America since immigration and immigrant consciousness. Both Sanjeev and Shukumar belong to educated upper middle class and both are supposedly second generation immigrants. Hence, they are more prone to accommodate to changes than the semi skilled labours or the first generation professional immigrant from the Indian subcontinent.

"When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine" is yet another story in which through the medium of food differences upheld in India are dissolved in America. Mr. Pirzada is a Muslim from East Pakistan who is serving a term in a New England university and visits the narrator's Hindu household regularly for dinner. Mr. Pirzada is the classic other, he is a Muslim and belongs to the rival/enemy country of Pakistan. But

Lilia's Hindu parents defy the barriers of religion and national politics. Their geographical propinquity and shared culinary culture overcomes their difference and they share meals regularly. Consequently, when Lilia mistakes Mr. Pirzada for an Indian, her father explains her the fundamental differences between an Indian and a Pakistani. But she is still quizzical:

> It made no sense to me. Mr. Pirzada and my parents spoke the same language, laughed at the same jokes, looked more or less the same. They ate pickled mangoes with their meals, ate rice every night for supper with their hands. Like my parents Mr. Pirzada took off shoes before entering a room chewed fennel seeds after meals as a digestive, drank no alcohol, for dessert dipped austere biscuits into successive cups of tea. (25)

For young Lilia, her parents' eating habits and Mr. Pirzada's were identical. Therefore, it was very difficult for her to understand the difference. Her father explains her about the partition and again he alludes to food – "he explained drawing on X with his finger on the countertop, 'like a pie. Hindus here, Muslims there'..." (25). Despite the divided pie their friendship blossoms. As Irma Maini observes, "Food is clearly an important part of the culture that binds them despite barriers of nation, nationhood, or nationalism" (161). She also underscores the fact that Lilia's parents and Mr. Pirzada have a common/shared language and culinary culture. Though politically they owe allegiance to different nations, and follow different religions, Lilia's parents have more in common with Mr. Pirzada than any Indian belonging to a different region. Lilia's mother cooks elaborate dinners despite unavailability of some crucial ingredients such as mustard oil in the supermarkets (24). Like several other characters in Lahiri's stories, Lilia's family also attempts to

replicate meals from their homeland; transforming their kitchen into a veritable Indian kitchen. Being a curious child, Lilia wanted to know what makes Mr. Pirzada different as her father had informed her. She finds Mr. Pirzada's habit of consulting his pocket watch which was set to local time in Dacca very strange. It is then that Lilia realizes Mr. Pirzada belonged to a place which was eleven hours before the American time. She observes, "I imagined Mr. Pirzada's daughters rising from sleep tying ribbons in their hair, anticipating breakfast, preparing for school. Our meals, our actions, were only a shadow of what had already happened there, a lagging ghost of where Mr. Pirzada really belonged" (31). This observation brings home the fact that immigrant /diasporic kitchens, lifestyles and habits are actually a shadow of the 'original' version of the homeland. Nostalgia reduces the culinary activity of the immigrants into a mimetic activity. The food preparation, unwilling alterations and consumption is a two fold activity. First, it placates the nostalgia for the Edenic homeland and second, it fuels yet another wave of nostalgia at the diasporic platter's difference from the original, unadulterated gastronomic experience. Thus, diasporic food ritual paradoxically satiates and reinforces nostalgia. It responds to homesickness simultaneously triggering it further. Thus, the cyclical and repetitive nature of immigrant cookery corresponds directly to the identity crises. It reaffirms the consumer's identity in terms of nationality and race.

It is important to note that the author not only presents the picture of an immigrant household in America, by elaborating on their eating mores, she also presents the case for the second generation, naturalized citizens of the immigrant community who witness the constant homesickness of their parents. Little Lilia is a child who has sharp observation, skills and an acute desire to assimilate in the mainstream culture. She wishes to be like other children, celebrating Halloween by

carving the pumpkin at the door or by collecting candies by shouting "trick or treat". She notices the world around and compares it with her own household and comes to conclusions based on the differences, she perceives such as, that Americans consume alcohol, while Indians, like her parents do not. Young that she is, she seems to imbibe the food as well as the ethos of her family. Yet, we can see that as an individual, she has her own eating mores, her own significance attached to the act of consumption. She confesses in the story that the first time she ever prayed in her life was for the safety of Mr.Pirzada's family. She would nonchalantly pop a candy into her mouth as if she were eating for Mr.Pirzada's sake and then pray:

> I put the chocolate in my mouth, letting it soften until the last possible moment, and then as I chewed it slowly, I prayed that Mr. Pirzada's family was safe and sound. I had never prayed for anything before, had never been taught or told to, but I decided, given the circumstances, that it was something I should do. That night when I went to the bathroom I only pretented to brush my teeth, for I feared that I would somehow rinse the prayer out as well. (32)

The most amusing thing about this ritualistic food consumption is Lilia's belief in the power of eating chocolate, so much so that she refuses to rinse off the effect from her mouth. Many critics have written about the preoccupation of oral experience in women's writings, ranging from food consumption to language of signification. Sneja Gunew points out, that experience seated in the mouth includes food and language. We can see that Gunew's main thesis is exemplified by Lilia's ritualistic chocolate eating. She evolves an ingenious system of signification, may be even supra linguistic, by her eating. Gunew in her paper quotes Maud Ellmann

where she remarks at that independent status of food and speaking – both the functions cannot occur simultaneously (98). But Lilia in her ritual attaches a significance to eating, which generates a meaning as potent as language does. This ritualistic eating seems to be a farfetched derivation of the wine and bread distributed in Christian communion, which is symbolically consuming Jesus's flesh and blood. Or the Hindu practice of eating god's leftover as 'prasad'. Such rituals, as George Simmel observes, transcend individuality and enable each person to feel part of the community (112). No doubt, Lilia's solitary consumption is contradistinct than the communal eating that Simmel theorizes. Paradoxically, Lilia eats without relish or for any nutritive benefits, her consumption is propelled by a non-personal, communal motive. The candy eating ritual becomes redundant when she is told that Mr.Pirzada reached Dacca, now in Bangladesh, safely. The closing lines of the story are, "Since January, each night before bed, I had continued to eat, for the sake of Mr.Pirzada's family, a piece of candy I had saved from Halloween. That night there was no need to. Eventually, I threw them away." (42). The magic of the ritual worked, rendering the chocolates as well as the ritual redundant.

"Mrs. Sen's" is another story told from a child's perspective. This story depicts the identity crisis of a newly immigrated Mrs. Sen in America. It also alludes to the Bengali predilection with fish. Mrs. Sen tries to come to terms with her new life in a new country by clinging on to her old ways – including sartorial and culinary habits. Eliot, an eleven year old ward under Mrs. Sen's day care, notices that the two things that made her happy were the arrival of a letter from her family in India and buying whole fish from the seaside. This story invariably reminds one of the Japanese American poet and activist, Janice Marikitani's epigram, "Making fish is a political act." In her poem, Marikitani writes about the effect on her

grandmother's stew because of a racist comment made by a vessel vendor. Thus, preparing fish becomes a silent way to battle racial subjugation and to perpetuate the national identity of the diasporic subject. From the broader political perspective to the persistence of personal identity, making fish, or for that matter any culture specific food, has mulitiple meanings in different aspects of diasporic life. The otherwise objectified immigrant cooks her own food and thus, becomes an active subject in her kitchen. A particular manner of preparating food also negotiates the gendered nature of the cook and the consumer. For Mrs. Sen, cooking fish the Bengali way is an activity inseparable from the memory of her homeland, thus little Eliot can see the correlation between the letter from India and the fish. She complains about the unavailability of fresh whole fish in America or about American fishes not tasting the same as fishes in Calcutta, and is filled with enthusiasm when she prepares any fish recipe:

> ...she pulled the blade out of the cupboard, spread newspapers across the carpet, and inspected her treasures. One by one she drew them from the paper wrapping, wrinkled and tinged with blood. She stroked the tails, prodded the bellies, pried apart the gutted flesh. With a pair of scissors she clipped the fins. She tucked a finger under the gills, a red so bright they made her vermilion seem pale. She grasped the body, lined with inky streaks, at either end, and notched it at intervals against the blade.
>
> "Why do you do that?" Eliot asked.
>
> "To see how many pieces. If I cut properly, from this fish I will get three meals." She sawed off the head and set it on a pie plate. (127)

This passage underscores the importance of native food in immigrant lives. Mrs. Sen makes numerous phone calls to get fishes of her choice. Even the mundane and repulsive process of chopping the fish is filled with sensuous detail. Just as in the case of Lilia's parents in "Mr. Pirzada came to dine", for Mrs. Sen preparing a usual dinner includes of a lot of fanfare. Preparing a meal was a time consuming labour, and Mrs. Sen is shown to have enjoyed it. She consumes nostalgia, literally. Interestingly, many critics observe that the enclosed domain of the kitchen and not constricting but full of creative possibilities. It is the space which belongs solely to Mrs. Sen in the new world, which is otherwise entirely unfamiliar to her. According to Eliot's point of view, Mrs. Sen's domain, i.e., her kitchen, was full of mysterious, even dangerous things "He especially enjoyed watching Mrs. Sen as she chopped things, seated on a newspaper on the living room floor. Instead of a knife she used a blade that curved like the prow of a Viking ship, sailing to battle in distant seas" (114). Eliot's comparing the Viking ship's prow to Mrs. Sen's typical vegetable cutting blade is an interesting juxtaposition of the American imagery incorporating Indian implements. It familiarizes the unfamiliar and brings it in the palpable semiotic proximity specific to the observer's culture. The same tendency is shown by Mrs. Sen when she eats calm cakes for the first time, which she seems to like, and compares it with the familiar *pakoras*. In more than one place the contrast between Eliot's mother and Mrs. Sen is delineated, for example, Eliot notices that his mother looked bare in her exposing attire in contrast with Mrs. Sen draped in sari. Eliot's mother's kitchen mores and food habits highlight her independence. Eliot knows that his mother eats sparsely,

> He also knew she didn't eat lunch at work, because the first thing she did when they were back at beach house was pour herself a glass of wine and eat

> bread and cheese, sometimes so much of it that she wasn't hungry for the pizza they normally ordered for dinner. She sat at the table as he ate, drinking more wine and asking how his day was, but eventually she went to the deck to smoke a cigarette, leaving Eliot to wrap up the leftovers. (118)

His family consists of his single mother and himself, and his mother's unwillingness to prepare elaborate meal or even consume a stomach full foregrounds a dysfunctional household vis-à-vis Mrs Sen's household replete with food. A non normative family set up makes Eliot's mother, as it appears, an alcoholic. Her work place seems to be a refuge for Eliot's mother instead of her home. This difference is further underscored when Eliot remembers the last time his mother prepared fillets was when a man from her office was invited for dinner. Eliot's mother hardly cooks; her culinary activity is centered around a guest who is incidentally a male. It is hinted that Eliot's mother indulges in culinary activity only when there are chances of heteronormativity in her life. She attempts at functionality in her household because of the ostensible family like structure in the presence of a man. Though she is overtly independent – she works, fends for herself and her son, knows how to drive, she is dependent on an external stimulant to venture into the gastronomical alleys of her own kitchen. On the other hand, sari clad Mrs. Sen who is not skilled to have a job, who cannot drive or even venture out of her house without Eliot's company, cooks fish for her self, rather than for her husband. Even when her husband advises her to cook chicken instead of fish, she ventures to the fish market to serve her own desire to replicate and reinforce her 'Bengaliness'. She seems to cook fish for the sheer joy of cooking and eating. For once, a female cook, cooks for her own self. Though she is the producer and mute server in the domestic setup, she has an autonomous will to serve herself with the food she desires the most. Figuring

at both ends of the kitchen - producer and consumer, she becomes an active participant in the food cycle. Her desire to consume whole fish is not a craving for comfort food, but responds to the broader issue of reasserting her Bengali identity. Her craving for fish seems comical and even borders on insane rebellion when she meets with an accident on her way to the fish shop with Eliot before procuring a driver's license. Her peculiar behaviour stems from her desire to become more independent in order to consume what she desires. As mentioned earlier, cooking Bengali food, metanomized by fish is a way to uphold their culture in the private domain of a Bengali immigrant's household. According to Krishendu Ray:

> Rice and fish become particularly potent symbols of Bengaliness precisely because outsiders, be they other Indians or Americans, are considered unable to appreciate them or incompetent in handling the bones. Rice and fish is considered a real insider delicacy. The honored guest is served the head and the ability to tackle it reveals the guest's insiderness...There is also a sense that you have to keep doing it – repeat the recipes over and over and keep eating rice and fish in the Bengali style. There is anxiety that it will vanish if it is not repeatedly performed. Repetition is not replication; thus, variations abound, but within limits...Through repetition, things become naturalized. Through repetition, rice and fish become the quintessence of Bengaliness. Here is a claim about the "very nature" or "substance" of Bengalis. (190-191)

Thus, as the title of his essay suggests, meals and migration are connected intrinsically. Food associated with an ethnic community becomes the quintessence of identity. And repetitive meals only reinforce the immigrant identity with all its

strengths and baggage. Mrs. Sen's constant yearning for real taste of home like food, and her faithful attempts to recreate the tastes and flavours of her homeland is to do with her gendered position within her society, which makes her a preserver of culture. The route of Mrs. Sen's immigration is overtly similar to her husband's, nonetheless different sets of gendered societal norms propelled her immigration. For a woman belonging to Mrs. Sen's society, there is a compulsion to marry well. Mrs. Sen's trajectory from the native land to the foreign land is the route of social and economical upward mobility upheld by her society. And despite the desirability of this mobility, women are given the task of adhering to the overt as well as inert manifestation of the culture, thus, it is important that she becomes bold and learns to drive, but does not stray from her sartorial practices or discontinue preparing food. This issue will be discussed further in the section dealing with *The Namesake*, where the female protagonist Ashima faces a similar predicament. This story captures the stagnancy which engulfs the lives of such uprooted Indian women who traverse this route through marriage to an eligible groom based in America.

Although the task of recreating a Bengali kitchen in America is arduous, Mrs. Sen works doggedly for it. She is lonely and restless in the new land. She misses the life where communal cooking was the norm in any celebrations. She yearns for the locale where women would sit and chop quintals of vegetables and chat simultaneously. Maini agrees that this image is very one-dimensional, naïve and Edenic, nevertheless, she maintains:

> Granted her image of life back "home" is uncritical but it is only an image. However, in the process of remembering she is inevitably creating what Salman Rushdie calls an "Imaginary Homeland," one that is made up of

> fragments and shards of memory, which is simultaneously rich with imaginative possibilities. Though Rushdie uses that phrase in reference to writers, Mrs Sen too is creating her narrative, not through writing but through the food she prepares, cooks, serves, and eats. This is a space she can call her own; here she gains agency and can assert her identity. (159)

Thus, Mrs. Sen is a creator too and her narrative constitutes not of writings but her cookery. As writers capture the elusive idea of India and 'Indianness' in their writings, Mrs. Sen tries to capture and relieve the real Indian culinary experience in her "narrative". Maini also mentions that Mrs. Sen, who is a cultural outsider because of her sari, vermillion, different accent and so forth, reaches out to Eliot and his mother "through one thing which she is confident about: her food." (Maini, 160). By rejecting the food served by Mrs.Sen, Eliot's mother seems to reject the bond that Mrs. Sen tries to create through food. Traditional food is the only thing which Mrs. Sen can hold on to in the new country with its alien culture and food habits. Though she is depicts as enjoying American food she continues preparing Bengali food in her kitchen. Through her kitchen, she refuses to assimilate into the American mainstream culture and yield to her husband's pressure to learn to drive or to stop buying fish. In the end, she meets with an accident while driving to buy fish with Eliot, this brings her baby sitting career to a sudden halt. This story too, like "A Temporary Matter," ends ambiguously; the reader is informed that Eliot does not get any babysitter and Mrs. Sen's fate is left undisclosed.

Like "Mrs. Sen's", the story of Miranda in "Sexy" is about the interaction of the Indian immigrant community and the 'mainstream' American. The tone of Eliot's observation of Mrs. Sen's is not sentimental, similarly, Miranda's

sentimental story of her love and break up with an Indian married man, Dev, is shorn off its sentimentality. Culinary images are not as loud and distinct as in other stories, nonetheless, food is as if lying carelessly with the characters. The story opens with Laxmi, Miranda's colleague, who munches Hot Mix regularly as she updates Miranda with a 'spicy' story of an Indian friend and her marital discord. Later, when Miranda visits an Indian store because of her new found interest in Indian things she recognizes the Hot Mix that Laxmi munches, but the shop keeper intervenes and warns, "Too spicy for you" (99). While he says this he stares at Miranda's body, reinforcing her 'otherness'. Here, Miranda is seen as the exotic other at the Indian store. During her affair with Dev, she spends a great deal of time acquainting herself with the Indian culture, and she begins with the most obvious marker of culture, viz., food. She frequently visits Indian restaurants and tries to learn Bengali. She is guilty at her childhood memory of her irrational fear of her Indian neighbours. She was scared at the picture of Kali displayed at her neighbour's house when she visited them for a birthday party, so much so that she could not eat the birthday cake out of fear. She then fantasizes the widely circulated and marketed images of camels and elephants as being representative of India, which falls within the Orientalist discourse. According to Paul Brians "The fact that Miranda's only other association with Indian people involves the fearsome goddess Kali may be meant to suggest potential vengefulness. Kali is a fierce warrior, slayer of demons, bedecked with the heads and limbs of her victims. Another threatening image is the "too spicy" Hot Mix, which implies that she may not have what it takes to hang on to Dev" (200). Her own cosmopolitan route to know and understand India is propelled by the desire to eat of the other, in order to know the other. Her desire to know Dev and his culture makes her experiment with her food. When Dev's wife visits India, they date

at various eateries, food here acts as inducer of the sexual act, probably as a psychological aphrodisiac. After his wife returns, Miranda buys things which she thought "a mistress should have" (92). She buys lingerie and an expensive cocktail dress. When Dev doesn't notice any of them, she buys a lot of food stuff like, "baguette and little containers of things Dev liked to eat, like pickled herring, and potato salad, and tortes of pesto and mascarpone cheese" (93). She resorts to conventional 'feminine' practices to gain control over Dev, she tries to capitalize first from her body and second from food. At Miranda's place Dev consummates his passion and the food Miranda has shopped. We can see Dev as being a typical consumer, he is at the more privileged end of the food cycle and Miranda is the facilitator. After baby sitting Rohin, Miranda resolves she would end her relation with Dev for good. She is shocked when young Rohin calls her 'sexy'. When asked, the child replies that sexy means "loving someone you don't know" (107). She realizes with disbelief that when Dev called her "sexy" at Mapparium, he confessed his love for her even without knowing her. She was just an object of his desire, a consumable entity for Dev. Dev is one of those people for whom people are more like objects, the classic brood of male chauvinist for whom women are passive objects. The parallel story of Laxmi's cousin's marriage also underlines the status of women as a commodity. Here ones sees that Lahiri has tread on the conventional path of objectifying woman as sexual consumables by aligning them with food. Ultimately, Miranda shuns off her objectified, passive status by putting an end to her relationship with Dev. At the end, she is shown to be outside the Mapparium, sipping coffee. The object of consumption, becomes an active consumer.

In the collection there are three stories based in India viz., "Interpreter of Maladies", "A Real Durwan" and "The Treatment of Bibi Haldar"; and of these, the

last one is not included in this study as it has no explicit food imagery. The title story, "Interpreter of Maladies" begins with the tourist cab driver Kapasi's observation about the young Das family. He observes that the family looked Indian, but their clothes were like foreign tourists. In addition, the entire family chews green gum, which also makes them 'non Indians'. Mrs. Das who has been ignoring Mr. Kapasi all along, shows interest in him suddenly when he informs them about his profession as an interpreter at the local doctors. She declares at once, and rather dreamily that his profession is very romantic. And immediately, she offers Mr. Kapasi a piece of gum. Offering food, as mentioned already, is the universally recognized gesture of offering friendship. Mr. Kapasi readily agrees to the gum. The narrator continues, "She reached into her straw bag and handed him a small square wrapped in green-and-white-striped paper. As soon as Mr. Kapasi put the gum in his mouth a thick sweet liquid burst onto his tongue" (50). The images of liquid bursting in his tongue brings out the sexual innuendo in the story. Mr. Kapasi is attracted towards Mrs. Das, he realizes later that he has never admired the body of his own wife as he admires Mrs. Das's legs. For Mrs. Das, offering gum is a simple act of extending her friendship to Mr. Kapasi, she believes that his job is more to do with psychic lives of the patients than their physical ailments. Thus, the title is very befitting, the term "interpreter" is also associated with unraveling of the secret language of dreams or comprehending different linguistic codes. But here, the interpreter is a go between of sorts in the doctor patient relation. Mrs. Das's ailing marital life, and her guilt about adultery draws her to Mr. Kapasi. Moreover, she shares her deepest and darkest secret uninhibitedly. But the image of chewing gum suggests that Mr. Kapasi's feelings are very different from hers, he desires her sexually. As Freudian psychoanalysis suggests, oral is the substitution of the phallic,

and author has proved it with her subtle wit. Later, when the car stops for refreshment, Mrs. Das beckons Mr. Kapasi to sit beside them at their table. By eating together, he is provided the inner space of a family member. They consume tea and pakoras together and listen to more of Kapasi's stories. Kapasi is exhilarated at this, he thinks that Mrs. Das is interested in him. He observes that Mr. Das and Mrs. Das looked like elder brother and sister baby sitting their siblings for a day. Their juvenile behaviour is not just evident from their interaction with their children, but also through Mrs. Das' munching puffed wheat. According to Mukhopadhayay, puffed rice and similar food is part of the food genre called the street food, which is associated with all the baseness of street in contrast with the reserved taste of the haute couture Bengali cuisine and hence, it is looked down upon by the Bengali Bhadralok, the middle class and upper middle class gentry (38-40). Thus, Mrs. Das's puffed rice consumption is in conjunction with Mr. Kapasi's observation about her being young. She is hardly shown feeding her children or tending to their needs, it is Mr. Das who is commissioned to do this.

Mr. Kapasi is mesmerized by Mrs. Das's attention, but later when Mrs. Das reveals to him the secret of her illegitimate son' birth. He is confused and shocked and realizes that she had been wanting to unburden herself. Her malady was either guilt or lovelessness and she thought that a doctor's interpreter may be able to help her. He feels like having water, "He considered asking Mrs. Das for a sip of water, then decided against it" (62-63). This decision of not asking Mrs. Das for water probably is because of his shock which makes Mrs. Das and things associated with her distasteful, if not downright 'impure'. Despite confessing her secret so carelessly, she is indeed tense, and pulls out the puffed rice packet from her bag and offers it to Mr. Kapasi before munching it herself. Kapasi's reluctance to accept and

consume food offered by Mrs. Das is an expression of his disgust and disappointment at the fact that she not only thought of him as a counselor who would provide some solace for her pain of infidelity, but also as an elder who would presumably have children of her age. His rejection of the puffed rice that she offers is his disapproval of her life interspersed with sexual jealousy. His failure as an interpreter of maladies occurs even when he could not comprehend Mrs. Das's ailment. Although, he thinks he would advise her to reveal the entire story to her husband and would act as a mediator between the couple, he begins on a wrong note, "Is it really pain you feel, Mrs.Das, or is it guilt?" (66). As a result, Mrs. Das glares at him with "mustard oil thick on her frosty pink lips" (66) and leaves him alone. Her frailness of character and her young and fallible age is reflected, as mentioned earlier, in her constant munching of puffed rice and when the sheen of her persona wears off, her pink frosty lips are shown to be smeared with mustard oil. The distant alluring beauty of America is smudged with oil from Indian street food, which seems to de-exoticize the American way of life.

"A Real Durwan" is interesting in its constant interplay of an imaginary past and a sordid present. Here, Boori Maa is a Bangladeshi immigrant who reaches Calcutta in utter destitution. She works for a housing colony and the people pay her in kind and a paltry sum of money for all the odd jobs she does. In her impoverished state she reminiscences about her bountiful past which is in stark contrast to her present of scarcity. In her hungry present, she enumerates the food she used to consume in the past. Lahiri in her typical understated style, does not even give the slightest hint as to whether Boori Maa actually had a past so glorious or whether it is the result of her fabrications. Food along with other luxuries from her past haunts her, and that, as Lahiri says, makes her "tart as curd" (70). Boori Maa in her

soliloquy enumerates all the delicacies that were served at her daughter's wedding and even arouses pity for her present state where she eats from her rice bowl. Boori Maa's pathetic tale is symptomatic of the immigrant condition of looking at the golden past, which is achieved by distorting the vacuous category of 'home'. As for Boori Maa, the magnitude of grandeur about her home increases day by day, like wise for the Indian immigrants in America, the land of (either forced of voluntary) exile, the tastes and smells associated with home, become more and more significant. Thus, they hanker after the pristine taste of their homeland – with bounty authenticity, identity, 'richness' in terms of culture and heritage.

Observing the importance of everyday rituals of life, Luce Giard rightly points out, "Every alimentary custom makes up a miniscule crossroads of histories" (171). Every meal prepared and consumed is significant in history. The ingenious concoction of a food item, the commonplace practice of mediation of the recipes, its cultural legitimization, and repetitive preparation and consumption, and its travelling across the culture, all contributes and mirrors the state of world affairs. "The Third and The Final Continent" is about mundane, everyday feats of an immigrant's life, which according to the protagonist, is no less than a miracle.

Judith Caesar maintains that contrasting images of home and outdoors predominate in most of Lahiri's stories, and "these empty American inner spaces are at the centre of the work of Jhumpa Lahiri." (52). Furthermore, it is analyzed that food and kitchen become fresh metaphors of the inner lives of the people living indoors and safeguarded by the house, as the story "Mrs. Sen's" testifies. The same politics of inside lives is delineated in, "The Third and The Final Continent". In this story we encounter several houses which the unnamed protagonist occupies during

his student days at England and then at America. In England, the dingy house had minimal furniture, with table covered with newspaper, bathtub used as kitchen sink. Although at the room at YMCA guesthouse in Cambridge was better than the one back in England, it was not satisfactory because the noise of the traffic perforated through the building at night. At last, the protagonist's first decent accommodation is at Mrs. Croft's, with a proper lock and key, and this becomes a safe haven for him. Along with the spaces that are narrativized in the story, food images are interspersed as well. Mrs. Croft is an American lady who adheres to a century old world of genteelness and finds the Indian protagonist with his deferential manner, a gentleman. Later, when he brings over his wife to visit Mrs. Croft, the latter examines her head to toe and declares her a gentlewoman. This encounter brings the emotionally distant couple together; the protagonist realizes that they are yoked together in an alien country. The story is about trivialities of life, which immigrants have to adjust to in the process of settling in another country. The ordinary runs parallel to the extraordinary feat of America's moon mission. The grandeur of this celestial event is reasserted along with the protagonist's rite of passage in America.

> While the astronauts, heroes forever, spent mere hours on the moon, I have remained in this new world for nearly thirty years. I know that my achievement is quite ordinary. I am not the only man to seek his fortune far from home, and certainly I am not the first. Still, there are times I am bewildered by each mile I have travelled, each meal I have eaten, each person I have known, each room in which I have slept. As ordinary as it all appears, there are times when it is beyond my imagination. (198)

Each mile he has travelled is as important as each meal he has had, from egg curry to cornflakes, to the 'proper' Bengali meals prepared by his wife, food he consumes is metonymic of his social and economic standing and his upward social mobility. The moon mission and immigration are but two great feats of human history. As Mrs. Croft is filled with pride and disbelief at the U.S. flag fluttering on the moon, the protagonist is filled with wonder at his own achievements and his journey from his home in India to two different continents, viz, Europe and America. He knows that though ordinary, his private conquest of settling in a country that is not his own, is the metanarrative of human history. His infinitesimally insignificant life may not even deserve a passing reference in the history of humankind; however, there are countless stories such that have collectively shaped world politics, economy and culture. Millions like him, who chose to travel under favourable or hostile circumstances around the world, have transmutated the direct ascription of any population group with the nation state. Food becomes the symbol of this hybrid world, consisting of people of different nationalities and skin colours under one aegis, for instance, the United States is home to individuals of almost every country in the globe. Food trails the footsteps of the population group settling in a new place. Through the routes of cultural exchange, food gets into the kitchen of different groups, and then into the commercial arena of catering and hospitality sector. Ultimately, it becomes the symbol of the people to which it belongs.

Personal is Political: Food Images in *The Namesake*

Many critics have studied the stories of "Interpreter of Maladies" and remarked on the implications of the culinary images employed by the author. *The Namesake,* too, focuses on Bengali immigrants in Boston, and is rich in images

pertaining to kitchen and food. Soma Kamal Tandon observes "Food is just one of the aspects Lahiri considers in exploring the discomfort of not-quite-belonging that her characters confront" (83). The personal act of food consumption becomes political because of the relative position of identity of the consumer with the consumable. Thus, as the popular line in feminist criticism goes, *The Namesake* reiterates the importance of the personal in the political. Just like most of the stories discussed at length in the above section, in this novel food serves several functions. The novel is about the Ganguli family, Ashoke comes to the United States after leaving behind the place where he was born and almost died. The story revolves around his wife Ashima, who suffers from an acute sense of exile in the new land. The later part of the story is devoted to their first child, Gogol Ganguli and the problems in his identity formation.

Lahiri's understated style is fully crystallized in her debut novel and along with it is her use of culinary imagery. One cannot ignore the all pervading presence of this imagery, so much so, that food and related images become Lahiri's favourite trope. In the immigrant's journey towards inevitable assimilation into the host culture, food acts as a potent, resistive tool. On the one hand, it remains as the daily remnant of the home left behind in the native land and on the other hand, serves as a reminder of the inassimilable immigrant position. Even the most meticulous likeness of the authentic food is at its best an imitation prepared from the tinned, canned, imported food products. Hence, Ashima's daily preparation and consumption as a ritual of identity assertion paradoxically also reiterates the fact that the land of their adoption is, and will always be, alien to their food ways, or vice versa. What Anita Mannur notes in her essay on Sujata Bhatt's poem about immigrant women's experience, holds true for Ashima as well. She observes that diasporic married

women are wedded to the belief that the faithful reproduction of culture lies in replicating the authentic food practices. She points out, "The domestic arena, so frequently associated with femininity, also becomes a space to reproduce culture and national identity" (14). Thus, Ashima's kitchen is a laboratory where she takes American ingredients and processes Indian food as an attempt to preserve identity. Nevertheless, the dynamics of food and consumption changes for the second generation Indian immigrants, as exemplified by Gogol and Sonia. Their names and skin colours notwithstanding, they are more or less holistically assimilated into the 'real' America. Native food tethers them to a household that is rooted in a land across the ocean. Rejection of Indian food by the young Indian-Americans is a rejection of the monolithic tradition of the native country that forms the core of their parents' identity. The new generation yearns for real American food and craves to be American without any burden. Lahiri poignantly shows the love-hate relation of the second generation immigrants with Indian culture, symbolized by food. Hence, attitude towards different kind of food showed by different generations is, if not opposite, very diverse. Along with presenting the immigrant predicament through food, Lahiri presents food as a part of the life cycle. She shows food in rituals celebrating birth, marriages, festivals, weekend parties and get together, and ultimately death. This section explores the relevance of food images in various stages of immigrant's life cycle. Furthermore, it examines the myriad emotions that food emotes in the characters' lives.

The novel opens on a humid August evening in 1968 when Ashima is pregnant and to satiate her yearning she prepares puffed rice (jhalmuri) in her Central Square apartment near the MIT campus at Cambridge. She yearns for this street food she used to have back in Calcutta. But she seems to dislike the taste

because of the lack of mustard oil. Lahiri mentions that the puffed rice concoction is a "humble approximation" (1) for the original snack sold back home. Ashima's deliberating food in terms of lack makes the background clear at the very onset of the novel. As Anju Bhatt rightly remarks, "The novel begins with a pathetic portrayal of anxiety, uneasiness and various psycho-sociological problems such as nostalgia, rootlessness, alienation, schizophrenia experienced by Ashima..."(38). Shifting to America is more of an exile for Ashima than her husband. She comes to terms with her life abroad through her culinary maneuvers where she tries to elicit the same taste as food from home but she is perennially disappointed at the failure to replicate the exact taste of her homeland. In the period when she is admitted to the hospital, she relishes the food served there, the jellos, ice creams and chicken salad. Unfamiliar food of the adopted country, which is otherwise repulsive to her, is agreeable to her due to her loneliness and labour pangs. After returning with infant Gogol to her apartment, she is insufferably lonely and yearns for the crowded hospital and its food. Her accepting the hospital food is not as same as her accepting the American food mores, but is a manifestation of her desire to stay connected with people which is partially fulfilled at the hospital ward with a friendly nurse. Her claustrophobia and fear of staying lonely is similar to Mrs. Sen's. Her home, after her husband leaves, makes her acutely aware of her isolation and she feels forlorn and a sense of exile creeps into her. Her mobility is limited because of her incapacity to move independently out of the house. She depends on her husband to buy her everyday things. Her first venture outside the house is when she is out of rice while cooking during her husband's workhours; she goes to the grocery along with little Gogol, she feels proud of her singlehanded accomplishment. Thus, rice, which is her staple food, becomes the excuse for Ashima to end her self-confinement and explore

the new world on her own. She is surprised and happy that people acknowledge her and her little child in the campus; few even approach her and talk to her. Ashima who is nervous in her lonely sojourn in a new country is filled with a renewed confidence after her motherhood. She begins exploring the neighbourhood, goes alone for her child's immunization, and even visits Ashoke's office with snacks. Alfonso-Forero mentions in the abstract of her paper "Immigrant Motherhood and Transnationality in Jhumpa Lahiri's Fiction" that the novel "offers motherhood as a site of agency for negotiating a transnational identity for the postcolonial female subject in diaspora". Motherhood and related activity which is decried by Western feminism is empowering in the context of the Indian diaspora. Activities traditionally associated with division of labour on the gender lines like motherhood, feeding the family, protecting culture and so forth, gain a new significance in the diasporic context. Lahiri very beautifully describes experiences of Ashima's motherhood:

> She drinks in the sweet, milky fragrance of his skin, the buttery scent of his breath. One day she lifts him high over her head, smiling at him with his mouth open, and a quick stream of undigested milk from his last feeding rises from his throat and pours into her own. For the rest of her life she will recall the shock of that warm, sour liquid, a taste that leaves her unable to swallow another thing for the rest of the day. (35-36)

She consumes the experiences of her motherhood and child rearing quite literally. She tastes her own milk coming from the body of her child. This incident shows the intrinsic connection between the mother and the child. Gogol's throwing up and Ashima's gulping it only reinforce the interdependence of the components of the

food cycle – the producer and the consumer. The inextricability of the mother-child biological connection is strengthened further by the consumption of each other's bodily produce. A similar, but undoubtedly a more intense image is presented in Suleri's *Meatless Days* (1989), where Suleri describes her dream wherein she consumes a little piece of the foot from her mother's corpse. She then interprets her dream, with a rather Freudian coup de grace, that she wanted to retain a piece of her mother for the sake of her siblings (44). With the accidental swallowing of the milk, Ashima retains her child within herself even after severing of the umbilical chord, and along with it, the experiences of motherhood too. The process of feeding and counter feeding is indicative of the parents in the diaspora, who evolve because of their children's life experiences. Traditionally, there has been a perpetuation of the iconography of women as feeding figures. Though opposed, protested by feminist groups for essentializing women as symbols of food and nourishment, this stance has been undercut by what can be termed broadly as a post-feminist development. Caroline Walker Bynum in her treatise on western medieval women and the religious significance of food raises questions on the contemporary unease associated with the image of women as food providers or women as the symbols of food and creation. In her concluding chapter, she calls for a categorical shift in what she perceives as a narrow feminist stance, and suggests an underpinning of the richness of this medieval imagery, and celebrates woman's body with its lactating and procreative capacities instead of being threatened by it or the desire to control it (297-302). It is obvious that Ashima's breast feeding her children and later, providing food to her children does not curtail her creative and expressive possibilities but invokes positive connotations from her dual role as a nourisher and preserver of the family's ethnic identity.

After her marriage and immigration to America, she learns about her husband's traits through his food habits,

> In the evening she cooks for him, hoping to please, with the unrationed, remarkably unblemished sugar, flour, rice, and salt she has written about to her mother in her very first letter home. By now she has learned that her husband likes his food on the salty side, that his favorite thing about lamb curry is the potatoes, and that he likes to finish his dinner with a small helping of rice and dal. (10)

Ashima gradually learns to accept the challenges in becoming an American housewife. Kitchen remains her forte for the rest of her married life. Assembling Indian cooking ingredients in America, and compromising by using the American alternatives available present a constant challenge to Ashima. Adhering to her tradition gives her the strength to evolve counter hegemonic strategies of survival in the Untied States. The strictures she has grown up with help her retain her identity and mould the identities of her family members. The constricting space of Ashima's kitchen to a large extent successfully guards her against the homogenizing McDonald's culture of America. Her first job is in a shop at Yale, where every week Ashima prepares thirty *samosas* for twenty five cents each. She develops a large social circle of Bengali families as more and more immigrants settle in the U.S and hosts countless parties on the weekends. It takes days for Ashima to prepare a large variety of Bengali food for these parties, however, she enjoys the proximity of the people belonging to her own community and makes sure her children learn to grow up to be Bengalis. As Gogol's wife, Moushumi, rightly observes later that the parents of the Bengali community considered each other "part of some makeshift

extended Bengali family" (204). So the weekend parties hosted were actually treated as family luncheons by Ashima, who never liked American food. As Gogol recalls, on their first visit to New York, the family hunted for an Indian restaurant for lunch. Ashima is forced to cook American food at Gogol's and Sonia's insistence. She grudgingly agrees to serve them tuna sandwich and even beef for their lunch. They have a pact that once a week she cooks American food for the sake of her children. Jhumpa Lahiri's depiction of the first generation American is largely based on her own parents and she reveals in an interview to *hinduism.about.com* that her parents were "suspicious of America and American culture when I was growing up. Maintaining ties with India, and preserving Indian traditions in America, meant a lot to them." She adds further that "Things like dating, living on one's own, having close friendships with Americans, listening to American music and eating American food – all of it was a mystery to them". Ashima, too, finds the American way of life mysterious, and looks down on it with some amount of cultural imperialism. During all the stages of her life in America, her knowledge of Indian traditions informs her and equips her to survive. Ashima instills the sense of 'Bengaliness' through language and food, cultural programmes like Indian film screenings, Pujo celebrations, written Bengali classes and so forth. Gradually, because of the insistence of children growing up in America, Ashima and Ashoke concede, albeit partially. According to Sunita Agarwal, "Ashoke and Ashima gave in many ways but it was only to peripheral values, i.e., food, dress which were negotiable but not the core values such as their culture and religious traditions" (33). This chapter contends that food is not a peripheral activity, but it is at the centre of race and ethnicity. It is one of the most important markers of identity and is a material manifestation of living culture that can be consumed, literally as well as figuratively.

And like culture which is an elastic category, food being a part of it is informed by changes in accordance to time and space. Thus, Ashoke and Ashima's relenting to their children's demands is not out of approval towards an alien food more, but due to parental pressure to help their children accommodate better to their environment. As Alfonso-Forero maintains:

> *The Namesake* depicts the cultural and national fluidity offered by this [motherhood] status: the immigrant mother, a central character in this novel, is able to preserve the Indian traditions that link her to her homeland while simultaneously benefiting from the privileges afforded by American citizenship in order to ensure a successful future for her American-born children. An Indian matriarch living in the suburbs of Boston, she does so through the careful negotiations she makes for her family on a daily basis in response to the often conflicting demands of traditional Bengali culture and the pressure to become an assimilated American.

Hence, at the supermarket, Ashima let the children fill the cart with items that they also consume. And so they fill the cart with cheese slices, mayonnaise, tuna fish, hot dogs and so on. Despite all this, we are told that she still wears a sari and Bata sandals and cooks proper Bengali meals. Ashima privileges food from her own kitchen over any American food. She recalls how her grandmother was the only one who was not afraid of any "signs of betrayal" by Ashima. As she was sure that Ashima would never eat beef, wear skirts or cut off her hair after landing in Boston (37). For Ashima, forsaking traditional food or clothes is tantamount to cultural betrayal. Further, allowing beef in her kitchen is as difficult as accepting her children dating in the American way. The story is about Ashima's partial

assimilation and acceptance of her children. Eventually, she realizes after her husband's death that though his ashes are immersed in the Ganges, in the country where he was born, his memories are connected to the place where he lived the major part of his life and eventually died. She understands that she too, belongs here, to America.

Ashima meets more and more young scholars and their bewildered wives, and gives them support and Indian recipes which she adjusted to American availability. She familiarizes the newly wed wives with the esoteric rites of this place, and thus carves a niche for herself even though she is away from her homeland. Her isolation, which initially made her maladjusted, empowers her eventually. In her farewell party before she sells her house in Boston, she cooks food she had been cooking in countless parties in her lifetime, knowing well that she would not have to cook these delicacies at 'home' in India, as she could buy them from the food vendor. She is conscious all the while that her exiled status has enabled a better life for her children in America, which is the site of fantasy and desire in middle class Indian households.

Pertaining to the importance of food in the life cycle of a person, Lahiri describes a very picturesque scene of an 'annaprasan', the first ritualistic rice ceremony. It is the first festive occasion for Ashima and her husband and she prepares six different vegetable dishes along with other items which takes her a week. People who come to attend the ceremony feed the child and thus "introduce him to a lifetime of consumption, a meal to inaugurate the tens of thousands of unremembered meals to come" (40). The finery and pomp of the first meal commemorates in advance, the mundane and inevitable act of food consumption.

Lahiri chronicles and gives comprehensive glimpses of those "unremembered meals" in the novel. From the time Gogol learns to enjoy tastes of his mother's kitchen to the tastes of America, we witness his smoking pot and drinking sprees. In Gogol's early childhood he would be served with frosted cake as well as a bowl of an Indian rice pudding, a more traditional Indian way to celebrate one's birthday. They celebrated the weekend close to the children's birthday with the Bengali community and the actual birthday with their American friends. Thus, befitting their half-Bengali half-American identity, Ashima's children have two birthdays, like two cultures and languages. She prepares his favourite things "lamb curry with lots of potatoes, luchis, thick channa dal with swollen brown raisins, pineapple chutney, sandeshes molded out of saffron-tinted ricotta cheese" (72). This fanfare does not stress her but hosting just a handful American children and serving them just with burgers and pizzas worries her because of their incomprehensible eating preferences. Here, we are reminded of "Sexy" where Miranda recalls her childhood encounter with the Indians, at a birthday party, where she was intimidated by the strong presence of 'otherness' and non-normativity at their place. Conversely, in the present case of othering by the conventional other, Mrs. Ganguli finds the mainstream American children's eating habits odd.

Gogol's growth is chronicled by the food he consumes. His initiation into complexities of teenage is displayed by his refusal to cut the cake on his fourteenth birthday. He grows up to like the taste of different households and cultures. Most of his relationships are propelled by food he consumes with the female concerned. Gogol is constantly burdened by his unusual name, as well as by his half American - half Bengali identity. He constantly compares the culture upheld and perpetuated by his parents as opposed to that of the mainstream Americans. His wish to consume

American food is a conformist strategy of a second generation immigrant individual. He and Sonia sway towards the majoritarian pull. Despite this, they are acutely conscious of the racist innuendoes which are missed by their parents. Gogol rebels, neither does he ascribe fully to Indian culture, nor to the American. His trajectory of rebellion is a little more than that of a regular teenage rebellion against the authoritarian parents, as a result of his half-American, half-Indian. He is fascinated by the American culture and resents the essential difference between the two. He moves away from his parents as much as he could. Besides smoking pot or drinking in secret, he becomes more and more vocal in showing his disapproval to his parents' ways of life. He enjoys the idea of American privacy along with food. Visiting India is distasteful to Gogol and Sonia. On Ashoke's sabbatical, the family spends eight months in India. The last meal provided on the flight to India is "an herbed omelette topped with a slice of grilled tomato. Gogol savors each mouthful, aware that for the next eight months, nothing will taste quite the same" (81). Once at their relatives' house, they are served hot milk with Horlicks and "sweet syrupy rossogollas" (82); they eat out of obedience though they have no appetite for it. This unappetizing welcome preempts their stay in India. Needless to say, the urban squalor of Calcutta and the pointlessness of visits to the relatives, along with heat is the focus of the next few pages. Gogol and Sonia are homesick, where as their parents feel at home. Amidst the feeling of uprootedness, the children suffer severe digestive ailments. Their indigestion is symptomatic of their unacceptance of India. The Indian climate and food is unpalatable to the American born Gogol and Sonia. For the first generation immigrant, the journey back is full of recuperative possibilities but for the second generation, it is an unnecessary and unavoidable exile, often manifested overtly by physical symptoms.

As we have noted in most of Lahiri's stories, in *The Namesake* too, food expresses the relationship between a man and woman. It heralds the relationship between Maxine and Gogol. They meet at a party, and a day after she invites him to dinner at her parents' place. Gogol is very conscious about the set up as he is unnerved to date a girl in the presence of her parents and he is surprised at the food served by Lydia. After wine, he is served, "a thin piece of steak rolled into a bundle and tied with string, sitting in a pool of dark sauce, the green beans boiled so that they are still crisp. A bowl of small, round, roasted, red potatoes is passed around, and afterward a salad." (133). Gogol is fascinated at the newness of this meal; he remarks that the numbers of dishes served are too few and mostly plain. He repeatedly compares his parent's eating habits with the Ratcliffs. He is certain that his mother would never prepare such a scanty meal for a guest. The ease of the dinner along with the glamour element attached to it is different from the eating ethos at his house, where food is the end and means of itself. The Ratcliffs are "vociferous" (133), they discuss about movies, good restaurants, the New York city buildings and so forth. It makes him feel that he does not know his own city. After the dinner table scene at the Ratcliff, Lahiri sets the ground for yet another at the Ganguli's. After repeated instructions of not holding hands or kissing in front of his parents, he prepares himself for the inevitable encounter of his parents and Maxine. As Gogol had expected, his mother had prepared varieties of items which is "too rich for the weather" (148). The lunch consists of "samosas,...breaded chicken cutlets, chickpeas with tamarind sauce, lamb biryani, chutney made with tomatoes from the garden. It is a meal he knows it has taken his mother over a day to prepare, and yet the amount of effort embarrasses him" (148). Gogol's discomfiture arises from the fact that after his stay with the Ratcliffs, he begins to perceive his family as

the ethnic 'other'. The otherization of his family's manners and mores stems from his desire to belong fully to the mainstream culture and the frustration arising because of the impossibility of complete assimilation. Gogol realizes with some amount of sadness, that despite living with the Ratcliff family for so long, Lydia is unclear about Gogol's nationality. He realizes with irony that the family he is more comfortable with than his own comprises of strangers. The chasm of culture, though invisible, will always persist. However, Gogol yearns for the childhood he never had, a childhood without a cultural baggage, without parents for whom 'home' is in India. Gogol wanted to really belong to someplace as Maxine belongs, pinned down to a place and culture, and possibly to the table, whose bounty and taste is not embarrassing or different.

Ashoke's sudden death shocks the family and for the first time, the family members seek each other's company. Gogol goes to the Cleveland hospital morgue to identify Ashoke's body. On his return he shaves off his hair in honour of his dead father, realizing for the first time the value of this esoteric ritual. For the first time, Gogol realizes the importance of his fragmented, half American – half Bengali identity and he understands that despite resenting his identity for so long, he is supposed to live with it. His acceptance of his roots bridges the gap between him, his dead father and his mournful mother. He is adamant that neither would he include Maxine in the mourning, nor take her along to India for immersing his father's ashes in the Ganges. For sometime, the overhauling presence of America is shoved aside by the children and they return 'home' to mourn their loss. During their mourning period, the family gives up meat and consumes bland food,

> Now, sitting together at the kitchen table at six-thirty every evening, the hour feeling more like midnight through the window, his father's chair empty, this meatless meal is the only thing that seems to make sense. There is no question of skipping this meal; on the contrary, for ten evenings the three of them are strangely hungry, eager to taste the blandness on their plates. It is the one thing that structures their day: the sound of the food being warmed in the microwave, three plates lowered from the cupboard, three glasses filled. The rest of it – the calls, the flowers that are everywhere, the visitors, the hours they spend sitting together in the living room unable to say a word, mean nothing. Without articulating it to one another, they draw comfort from the fact that it is the only time in the day that they are alone, isolated, as a family. And only for its duration is their grief slightly abated, the enforced absence of certain foods on their plates conjuring his father's presence somehow. (180-181)

Consuming tasteless food without the festive excess of spices or meat metaphorically denotes wallowing in one's sorrows. A different set of alimentary, sartorial and social rules govern the Indian family in the mourning period; not only the ingredients used in cooking, but also the utensils used are minimized in the mourning period (R.S. Khare, 182). Bland food is equated with fasting, where a systematic dearth is created for the abundance and surplus which is associated with feasting. Only after the ten days of mourning, the family invites guests to shed off the inauspiciousness of death and purify it through purification rituals and feasting in honour of the dead. After the mourning period, on the eleventh day, they cook fish and meat as Ashoke liked the most. This festive dinner marks the end of the mourning period.

After Maxine, Moushumi enters Gogol's life. She is the daughter of Ashima's family friend, a Bengali American herself. They meet at a restaurant and Moushumi invites him for a Sunday lunch at her place. She is fidgeting in the process of preparing Coq au vin and seeks Gogol's help. They end up making love instead and discover very late that the meat is so badly burnt that pan has to be discarded. Preparing food together provides an intimacy for the couple which has the psychological effect of foreplay. This semi-comical food image of a spoilt chicken dish indicates the haste in their relationship and the tragic culmination too. Wastage of food and utensil foregrounds the destruction of love and trust. Moushumi who is a rebel against her Bengali mother's strictures, is unhappy after her marriage. She is utterly discontent with her marital life because she could see herself being enclosed in her tethered domain like her mother. On her anniversary, they go to a restaurant; she finds fault with everything, including the food served to her. Her inability to enjoy their anniversary dinner prepares the ground for the readers for the further twist in the tale, where Moushumi commits adultery with her childhood friend, Dimitri.

In the relationship of Gogol with Maxine as well as Moushumi, we observe that food acts as a facilitator of the relationships. A shared meal always opens up the possibility of sharing a relationship. Breaking the bread not only establishes equality but also brings about intimacy between the couple – it helps them consolidate their physical and emotional relationship. Even in Dimitri and Moushumi's relationship, we see that food acts as a tantalizer. Dimitri, who is too foreign and attractive for Moushumi, seduces her through his cooking. Thus, the process of sharing food negotiates the sexual nature of the people's relationship and food becomes an aphrodisiac. As Sarah Sceats observes,

> The connection of food with sex is complicated, for there is an intertwining of two drives or appetites that are not easy to disentangle or identify as distinct...Even the term sexual *appetite* makes the connection, what is subject-specific language moves freely between the two areas of food and sexuality...The use of food and eating as a deliberate sexual metonomy or metaphor is a long-established tradition, especially for suggesting human flesh and sexual intercourse. (22-23)

Further, she implicates that language of food and the language of sexuality are so interconnected because both are a direct manifestation of the body's needs. She alludes to Freud's essay on sexuality, where he argues that the sexual instinct is generated out of the infant's earliest experiences of eating (24). Thus, the inextricability of food and sexuality in Lahiri's novel can be understood in terms of Freudian psychoanalysis.

It is clear from the foregoing analysis that *The Namesake* is significant for its subtle underpinning of the fact that the issue of identity is well deliberated in the seemingly mundane activity of eating and cookery. Lahiri's preoccupation with the realm of cookery proves the thesis that the importance of food intensifies in a scenario where there is an identity conflict. Besides than the theme of identity, the importance of food is underscored in its protean roles – it symbolizes myriad human feelings, in addition to its cultural significance in the different stages of human life.

In this chapter, an attempt has been made to establish that food symbolizes disruption of normative households and becomes an alternative mode of communication. It has heightened significance in the diasporic context including the different states of the life cycle ranging from birth to death. The contrast between the

world view of the first and the second generation immigrants is successfully shown through food. Whilst the first generation individuals like Lilia's parents, Mrs. Sen and Ashima, adhere to their cultural codes and traditional food, the new generation is torn between their familial loyalties and their own preferences. The second generation does not uphold and glorify their origins as Divakaruni's characters in *The Mistress of Spices* and *Queen of Dreams* through the aid of magic, or decry India as Mukherjee's Jasmine and Dimple. Lahiri's second generation Indians are situated in a precarious middle space as exemplified by Gogol. He enjoys global cuisines but consumes proper Bengali meals when he is with his mother – he neither critiques nor celebrates his dual identity but accepts it nonchalantly after an initial rebellion as a way of his life. The first generation is often depicted as heroic in its efforts to maintain a semblance of India through the kitchen. In addition to producing food, an immigrant kitchen has an added responsibility of dispensing culture in regular doses. Ashima is also a 'recipe giver' like Jasmine is, but her circle is restricted to the Bengali wives who are newly immigrated. She preserves India in the narrow domain of her household instead of reaching out to American culture and participating in a two way cultural exchange like Tilo does. The Bengali ghetto becomes the strength as well as the weakness of the community. Similarly, strict adherence to a particular kind of food impedes easy cultural transaction between individuals. Gogol is delighted when he is accepted into the Ratcliff's kitchen but is uneasy to assimilate Maxine into his own. Lahiri seems to imply that a systematic cooption of different kind of food and kitchen mores can enable the cooption of different worldviews.

In addition to the cultural significance of food, the author highlights the importance of food in the interpersonal transactions of people in their daily lives –

on the one hand, food becomes the symbol of love and care, it harbingers a new relationship and it has cathartic effects. On the other hand, it becomes the locus of difference, a site of contention in the bi-polar world differentiating between 'authentic American' and the 'other'. The diverse symbolism that food evokes creates continuity in Lahiri's stories and the novel discussed, and furthermore, links them to the social text of everyday life and culture of the diaspora.

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CHAPTER IV

FOOD AND MAGIC: DIVAKARUNI'S RECIPE OF THE IMMIGRANT IDENTITY

> In America, where I now live, cooking odours can still provide a key to the ethnic identity of households in urban neighbourhoods. This is especially true of large cities where immigrants from many countries live side by side. I have often heard people identify the fragrance of cinnamon, cardamom and clove, especially in conjunction with onion and garlic, as 'Indian' cooking.
>
> — Chitrita Banerji, *The Hour of the Goddess*(87)

Banerji's award winning food memoir reflects the significance of tastes and odours of her homeland (Bengal) in her land of adoption. She has clearly delineated the correlation between everyday food practices and identity; Indian identity, like Indian food, is associated with certain spices and fragrances. Though Banerji adds that Indian food is an elusive and non-existent category, but in the imaginings of all the westerners who tend to essentialize India and everything that belongs to it, Indian food is homogeneously spicy. Chitrita Banerji's namesake, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni utilizes the interplay of several essentalized images related to India, including food and magic, for positing a new meaning of being an Indian immigrant in America. In addition to the culinary images, Divakaruni's works are punctuated with the use of the magical realist technique; she incorporates the mystical elements of folk-tales from India in her fiction dealing with life in America. Through food and other kitchen images, Divakaruni tries to elaborate on the hyphenated identity of the Asian-American population especially, women of this community. Her characters do not aspire for total Americanization like the characters in Bharati Mukherjee's works but celebrate their Indian identity through the carnivalesque of food and magic. Food

and magic are foregrounded as empowering agents for the Indian immigrant community settled in America, further, they help them resist racial abuse and mould their identity in a positive manner. This chapter will assay the correlation between every day food and magic that is presented in two of Divakaruni's novels that delineate the immigrant experience in the United States., viz., *The Mistress of Spices* (1997) and *Queen of Dreams* (2004).

In *The Mistress of Spices,* Divakaruni has exploited a wide gamut of signifieds that spices could have evoked. Food and spices are enriched here by associating them with spells and magic, endowing symbolic values to them, making auguries out of them. Spices, in this novel, are treated as animated beings, which intervene and improve the lives of the Indian consumers settled in America. *Queen of Dreams* is another mystical novel about dream interpretation and food. The main plot of the novel is the relation of Rakhi and her dream interpreter mother Mrs.Gupta. In addition to the magical elements sprinkled through the world of dreams, the fortune of the food joint owned by Rakhi and her friend forms the important subplot. This novel is preoccupied with images of food as a contradictory marker of identity and personal emotions. It also raises questions about the politics of preparation, consumption, acceptance and rejection of food. The rationale behind the selection of these texts is the uncanny similarity in the titular characters of both the novels and their preoccupation with food. Both are immigrants, 'trained' in India in the magical arts in different mystical women's enclave, both migrate to America and find themselves resolving problems in the lives of fellow South Asians through their special skills. Further, the novels foreground food and spices, and their role in the lives of Indian immigrants living in America. The Mistress, Tilo, is a sorceress of spices, healing the Indian immigrant community, while the titular character in

Queen of Dreams, without her first name ever mentioned in the novel, is a prophesier who is trained to see dreams and forewarn people. Both were trained in their special arts at a pre-modern, pristine locale – Tilo at the spice island and Mrs. Gupta at Dream Caves. They are trained by powerful matronly figures and thus both belong to and perpetuate a matrilineal tradition. Ultimately, both women come to America and transform several lives around them through their arts. They both rebel against the narrow strictures of their tradition and adopt a broader worldview. Further, the two women work at the intuitive level to aid people with the everyday problems of their lives. They easily shift gears from the supra-real domain of their art to the commonplace reality of immigrant life. Mundane tasks of consumption and preparation of food are linked with magic thus, both the texts taken up for study employ the magical realist technique. This chapter claims that by the use of the magical realist device and culinary images the author tries to represent the story of a culturally marginalized population of the United States. Both the protagonists are providers of food; Mrs. Gupta cooks for her family, while Tilo owns a spice store. Hence, the seemingly mundane category of food is interspersed with magic like Esquivel's romantic tale, *Like Water for Chocolate* (1992). However, Divakaruni's conflating of magic and food is more political than romantic. She tries to delineate the problems of identity formation faced by the Indian immigrant population. On the one hand, this community cannot discard its traditional worldview and on the other hand, desires to acquire the new culture in tis entirety. Divakaruni, through Tilo and Mrs. Gupta suggests a positive, albeit a limited commingling of cultures for the growth of the immigrants. As Hillary Dawn Hester maintains, Divakaruni along with Katherine Vaz "translate their narratives of immigrant life in twentieth-century United States using a coupling between the genre of Magical Realism and Culinary

Fiction to communicate how cultural oppression can persecute immigrant women in a foreign land unless a certain level of assimilation is attained" (4). Divakaruni's protagonists help people facing identity crises in America by retaining only the positive elements of both the cultures. Besides the similarities evidenced in the two protagonists, there are other parallels in the texts. For instance, *Queen of Dreams* presents a comprehensive dialogue between various art forms: dream interpretation, translation, painting, music, and above all cookery. Various art forms discussed in the novel drive home a point that cookery is an art form. Further, *The Mistress of Spices* and *Queen of Dreams* have passages where writing fiction is conflated with cooking food – thus, cookery is laden with metafictional attributes.

A brief account of the life and works of the author Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni would help to throw more light on the underlying themes and tropes that she reiterates through her writings. Divakaruni was born in India in 1956 and migrated to America at the age of nineteen. She began her writing career as a poet and then moved on to writing novels. Her writings deal with the issues of cultural conflicts, the amalgam of the traditional and the modern, and the hybridized identity of Indian immigrants in the American society. Her poetry collections, *Black Candle* (1991) and *Leaving Yuba City* (1997) are the result of her deep involvement with the socio-cultural problems challenging her community in India as well as in the United States. Her first collection of short stories *Arranged Marriage* (1995), won her the American Book Award for its enchanting portrayal of the women belonging to the Asian-American community. *The Mistress of Spices* (1997) is her first novel, which is deeply poetical as well as acutely political. The author candidly explains her transition from poetry to short stories to novel, "...I found that all of my poems were becoming narratives...And I wanted to explore it through a medium which would

allow me more space: stories. Then I got greedy; I wanted more space. I moved into writing novels" (SAJA). The author has endowed this novel with a fluid structure and a lyrical quality. According to Shashi Tharoor, this is an "unusual, clever and often exquisite first novel that stirs magic realism into the new conventions of culinary fiction and the still-simmering cauldron of Indian immigrant life in America."

Her next novel, *Sister of my Heart* (1999) and its sequel, *Vine of Desire* (2002), is the story of two best friends and cousins, Anju and Sudha. Yet another novel unraveling the intricacies of female relationship is *Queen of Dreams* (2004), where the focus is on a mother-daughter relationship and a food joint. On the one hand, this novel focuses on a contemporary issue of the racist attacks in America in the aftermath of 9/11, and on the other, explores the timeless world of occult and dreams. Divakaruni consciously addresses the issue of racism in America because of the first hand experience of a racist attack. She tries to elaborate the category of immigrant subject, and delves into the meaning of being an American despite a constant longing for an imaginary homeland, as Rushdie would put it. Divakaruni's latest work, *The Palace of Illusions* (2008) is a narrative based on the life of Draupadi of the *Mahabharata*. Divakaruni has also written several books for young readers. Stylistically, Divakaruni uses a language rich in poetry, borrowing images and symbols from India and especially from her mother tongue, Bengali. Abundant use of visual, olfactory and gustatory imageries in her writings makes reading her works a sensory experience.

Divakaruni brings to the fore the images that are associated with her childhood that she had spent in India; of these images, the most striking is her

kitchen imagery. In her works, she captures the aroma of Indian food prepared in countless kitchens. She extends her authorial vision to include the nameless women sweating in the kitchen heat, preparing food and thus, facilitating cultural and physical nourishment for other members. Divakaruni gives life to spices and tries to uplift the category of cookery and include it in the echelon of art. Culinary images recur in her writings in various forms, underpinning her preoccupation with the intermingling of the mundane and the magical.

The Mistress and Her Spices

Divakaruni has woven a beautiful tale of love and emigration in America, foregrounding a spice shop and along with it Tilo, the old shop keeper and sorceress dispensing spiritual aid to its customers. Tilo's world revolves around the spices and those whose lives are ameliorated by spices, until a "lonely American" intrigues her with his mysterious aura and a probing gaze (68). Regardless of all caveats the spices put forth, Tilo transgresses one boundary after another till destruction ensues. Divakaruni has depicted a realistic picture of the challenges faced by the immigrants in America through different characters responding to cultural conflicts as they frequent Tilo's shop, the Spice Bazaar. Spices, the commodity hailing from the land that the immigrants had left behind, come to their rescue through the food that they cook and consume in the new land.

Written in the first person narrative, we hear the Mistress introducing herself at the onset of the novel:

> I am the Mistress of Spices...
>
> But the spices are my love.

I know their origins, and what their colours signify, and their smells. I can call each by the true-name it was given at the first, when earth split like skin and offered it up to the sky. Their heat runs in my blood. From *amchur* to *zafran*, they bow to my command. At a whisper they yield up to me their hidden properties, their magic powers.

Yes, they all hold magic, even the everyday American spices you toss unthinking into your cooking pot...

But the spices of true power are from my birthland, land of ardent poetry, aquamarine feathers. Sunset skies brilliant as blood. (4)

The spices, in the very opening lines of the novel, acquire some amount of defamiliarization, despite the mention of their everyday mundane use in kitchens. "The spices of true power" are foregrounded as a divine commodity India had to offer to the human race. The reader is further informed that the magic will be unleashed from the spices only when Tilo enlivens them with her chants. Thus, Tilo, the mistress of the word, is the mistress of spices. The beginning of the novel takes the reader directly to the protagonist and her magical world without much ado. The allusion to the American spices at the outset of the novel apparently assumes an American readership. Yet, Divakaruni does not give us detailed, and much debated foot-notes like other writers of the Indian diaspora (Mandal,15), but retains the indigenous names of the spices. The text, thus, does not directly cross over the linguistic and cultural barrier thereby catering to the white audience. Conversely, it expects the reader to take the initiative to translate the cultural context. Structurally, the novel is divided into fifteen chapters, named after different spices, beginning from "Tilo", "Turmeric", "Cinnamon", "Kalo Jire", "Neem",

"Sesame" and so forth. The first chapter is called, "Tilo" while the last chapter is called "Maya", named after the protagonist's new name after she loses her former status of 'mistress' of the spices.

The Mistress chooses 'Tilo' as her name, which means sesame, the spice of nourishment. Tilo is spice personified – she adds stability and hope in the lives of all her customers. Dispensing herself as a commodity, she facilitates her consumption for the benefit of others. Covered with wrinkles, draped in a sari, confined within an ageing body and enclosed in the spice shop with spices monitoring her; Tilo, the alleged mistress of spices is, as Soniya Domergue says, "simultaneously deified *and* confined" (71). She has no company but the spices, no refuge but her store, and no skill but the intuitive healing powers bestowed on her by the spices. An immigrant herself, she was transported to America with the divine mission of alleviating the condition of the downtrodden Indian lot; she came with knowledge of dispensing spices for curing maladies – corporeal and otherwise. She herself becomes a consumable product for the larger benefit of the society. However, Tilo's love for the spices is rivaled only by her attraction to Raven. After meeting Raven, she is torn between the choice of personal happiness or collective good. Tilo wishes for a life where she can get both – Raven's love and the love of the spices. Metaphorically, she aspires for the old traditional way of life, as well as the new aspirations drawn from the American land. She herself becomes the contested site where her desires and her loyalties tear her apart. However, at the end, the obedient mistress becomes rebellious. She becomes independent of the spices, breaking almost all the sacred rules she had willingly agreed to adhere to before coming to America. One can say that the spices carve Maya out of Tilo by humbling her and abandoning her in the end.

Purnima Mankekar's interesting study of the Indian stores in the Bay Area of San Francisco, observes how grocery stores, "enable the production and consumption of a range of texts, images, and commodities that participate in this ongoing construction of India and Indian culture" (197). Further she comments that these stores function as social spaces where they, "inaugurate patterns of sociality that both extend and disrupt hierarchies of value originating in the "homeland", even as they produce heterogeneous relations of powers along axes of gender, kinship, community, and race in the diaspora" (211). Tilo's spice shop, in this case seems to follow Mankekar's prototypical Indian grocery store situated in the same locale, underpinning the Indian value system and interrogating stringent rules imported from India. Tilo's shop becomes the space where different kinds of problems afflicting the community are addressed. Lalita is the first customer to enter the shop as the novel begins. She is a victim of marital violence and to make matters worse, she has no support system in America. Forced to migrate to America after her fateful marriage with a much older man, Lalita represents countless Indian women 'given away' in marriage to Indian men settled in America for purely economic reasons. Tilo encourages Lalita to leave her husband and seek a new life of self-empowerment through joining a battered women's house run by Indians; needless to say, the spices constantly support her. Lalita is given turmeric for summoning up courage to resist her husband's abuses. She leaves her abusive husband and takes refuge at a battered women's home run by Indians, she is ultimately hopeful of a better future ahead. Similarly, Tilo supports Gita, a customer's granddaughter, in her decision to marry a Chicano. Tilo convinces Gita's rigid, orthodox Indian grandfather to respect her wish. Further, she reassures Gita of her family's love and attachment for her. Throughout the novel, Tilo bestows a particular spice to each

troubled woman, helping her tackle the pressures of the Indian family system. The shop, on the one hand, hails the Indian ethos, on the other, challenges the oppressive strictures against women. Throughout the novel, Tilo helps her women customers shape their individualities as women. Through her spice magic, she prods them to question the roles of 'mother', 'wife' or 'daughter-in-law' assigned to them by the patriarchal society of India. In addition, the spice shop also functions as a liaison centre within the Indian immigrant community - the shop posts advertisements of other shops and services run by members of the community.

In addition, the spice shop in the novel brings about a communal affiliation of the underprivileged. Its beneficiaries are not only Indians with thwarted dreams, but also people like Kwesi, an Afro-American and Raven, a Native American. Despite the silent racist glares by the Indian customers frequenting the shop, Kwesi buys spices and other ingredients from Spice Bazaar. Even Raven has to endure Haroun's hostility at the shop because of his 'white' features. The Indians treat the Spice Bazaar as a liminal space, permitting only the Indians. By and large, they are intolerant of the white or the black intruders in their shop. However, Tilo is much more accommodating than her Indian customers are, and welcomes all her customers, irrespective of their skin colour, into the shop. Significantly, the prominent non-Indian characters do not belong to the 'mainstream' America, but are marginal in their own land. It seems that the spices instinctively attract the members of the victimized lot by providing them hope and reassurance that they desperately need. Obviously, the spice shop propagates an alternative power front comprising the subalterns, who come together with the shared knowledge of their traditional wisdom against the hegemonic force of American cultural homogenization. The shop hints at the formation of a new community consisting of inhabitants on the

margins, by shaping itself as a refuge from the dominant cultural forces operative in the so called multi-ethnic society of America.

The novel is very sensitive to the issue of racial discrimination in the United States. Tilo, through her power envisions Mohan, a food vendor, beaten up to disability by a group of white hooligans. He migrated to the United States with the dream to improve his life, but instead is "broken in body broken in mind by America" (172) The customers of the store too are the victims of racial slurs. One of the rules Tilo breaks is that of reading the newspaper, and to her shock, it is full of reports about racist attacks in the city. Tilo is aghast at the newspaper stories she reads and has several visions simultaneously:

> The man who finds his grocery windows smashed by rocks, picks up one to read the hate-note tied around it. Children sobbing outside their safe suburban home over their poisoned dog. Woman with her duppata torn from her shoulders as she walks a city pavement, the teenagers speeding away in their car hooting laughter. The man who watches his charred motel, life's earnings gone, the smoke curling in a hieroglyph that reads *arson.*
>
> I know there are other stories, numerous beyond counting, unreported unwritten, hanging bitter and brown as smog in America's air.
>
> I will split once again tonight *kalo jire* seeds for all who have suffered from America. (172-173)

Helpless as she is due to being confined to her spice store, Tilo prays for all those who are grieved, and uses spices to heal their wounds. Spices, a mundane commodity used in kitchen, have the power to ameliorate the world of its misery. It is noteworthy that in the postcolonial world, spices are shown to bring together the

victims of the present day imperialism. Spices soothe the victims and provide them strength to combat the hurdles in the new land.

In an interview with Morton Marcus, Divakaruni clarifies that in, "Indian folk beliefs, spices are used for more than flavorings. They have magical powers all their own, and they provide remedies for physical maladies as well as cures for spiritual ills. You have to be careful how you use the spices, since their misuse can be dangerous." In the novel we are told, "for each person there is one special spice...It is called *mahamul*, the root spice, and for each person it is different. *Mahamul* to enhance fortune, to bring success or joy, to avert ill luck..." (71-72). Different characters are shown to have different problems, Tilo selects the spices, which could end their suffering and help them to get what they desire. Jagjit, a schoolboy, who is friendless in the new land is given cardamom, which gets him new friends to help him see the bright side of being in America. Haroun is given *kalo jire* so that he is successful in his new profession as a cab-driver, also this spice is supposed to save him from any impending accidents. Geeta's grandfather is given *Brahmi* oil to control his anger, while Geeta is given fenugreek for sustenance. Tilo facilitates all her customers to face the trials and tribulations of their lives bravely. Through her spice magic, she helps them shape their identities as strong individuals; she gives them strength to be victorious in their life in America.

Tilo is an archetypal rebel, she questions most of the rules and break them all. Her attraction to Raven gives her the strength to challenge the spices. The novel upholds and foregrounds Raven, as the spiritual counterpart of Tilo in America. Raven is not mainstream American but belongs to one of the most marginalized groups in America. His lot has been subjected to economic and political exploitation

since centuries. Raven, like his people, had to face a difficult choice of either passing as a mainstream white American or adhering to his 'different' culture. Raven's mother shuns her identity markers and masquerades as a white American. It is only after a disturbing spiritual encounter with his great grandfather that the truth about his mother's origins is revealed. He then realizes that everything he appreciated about his mother, including her name, was fake. It was a conscious self-fashioning by his mother to pass off as a white, American woman. This revelation is a turning point in his life, which makes him distance himself from his mother and the values she espouses. After undergoing a prolonged inner conflict and soul searching, he re-christens himself, thus openly embracing his Native American identity. He becomes spiritually inclined, so much so, that he is the only one who perceives Tilo's true identity through his dreams. They relate to and bond with each other because they both face a similar kind of conflict, both belong to different marginalized communities, both stand for a worldview, which differs from the 'rational' worldview of the West. Tilo and Raven both prioritize the metaphysical rather than materialist aspects of life; hence, they resist the hegemonic, homogenizing culture of America. As Tilo realizes after Raven narrates the story of his encounter with his great grandfather, "Raven too holds a legacy of power" like herself (203). The novel clearly underpins this interracial consolidation as the strongest tool, which can combat racism and further hints that subalterns who have a shared consciousness of subjugation can form an alliance.

Tilo is inevitably attracted to Raven and the latter's mystical knowledge makes him breaks through the barrier of external form and reach to Tilo's inner self. Her attraction for Raven gives Tilo the impetus and inspiration to break one rule after another. She ventures out of her shop, buys the forbidden mirror, reads the

newspaper, and even indulges in a pleasure trip to San Francisco with Raven. The spices are not mute spectators to Tilo's rebellion; they get back at Tilo in their own way. As Tilo is deeply attached to all her customers, the spices punish her customers for her mistakes. Jagjit is involved in drug peddling; Tilo realizes that cardamom attracted the wrong people towards the lonely Indian child. Similarly, Tilo's remedies and charms become ineffective for Geeta's grandfather and Lalita, leaving her feeling desperate and guilty. She also feels that Haroun is punished because she was late to provide him with *kalo jire* seeds. Tilo is enraged, when Haroun is injured badly in a racist attack. She, for the first time, decides to use the power of Lanka, the most potent of the red chilli family. Her incantations summon the destructive power of the chilli to purge the city of its hatred towards different groups. First Mother reprimands her for using red chilli, according to her, Tilo "should not have released its power into this city that has too much anger in it already" (235). Nevertheless, the recalcitrant Tilo insists, "the anger of chilli is pure, impersonal. Its destruction is cleansing, like the dance of Shiva" (235). However, Haroun's hope for a better future makes her change her plan, and instead she releases the power of chilli into the sea, praying to the spices to withhold unleashing the destruction. Nonetheless, the spices maintain that it is too late to prevent the imminent destruction.

Knowing that she has been summoned for a fiery trial, Tilo decides to consummate her passion with Raven. She misuses the power of spices on herself to make herself as beautiful as Tilotamma, the divine damsel in the heavenly kingdom of god Indra, and her namesake. Despite her love for Raven, she is not totally convinced by Raven's love. She is sure that Raven loves her because of her being an 'authentic Indian', which he failed to become himself. As she writes in her farewell letter to him, "Our love would never have lasted, for it was based upon fantasy,

yours and mine, of what it is to be Indian. To be American" (292). She does not believe in the American – Indian dichotomy. She believes in spices, which symbolize age old traditions, but in her breaking the spice rules she does not disregard the Indian way of life, but espouses a progressive assertion: rules should change with time and place. The rules of the country she has left behind cannot function in the new land that presents different challenges. In the end, the spices do not punish the mistress, however, they leave her. Tilo is certain that spices have caused the earthquake. Domergue rightly points out that the earthquake is the spatial equivalent of Tilo's mental upheaval (73). The earthquake ensues at the exact moment when Tilo is about to jump into the fire. Neither is she burnt nor is she transported back to the island in Shampati's fire. She gets her original body back and is rescued by Raven from the debris of her erstwhile shop. Hence, spices leave Tilo without punishing her, thus setting her free on the path chosen by her to help the people around and make a worldly paradise in the new the world. It is a powerful resolving technique used by the author to suggest the destruction of the materialistic world. The novel hints that the devastation will cleanse the city of its prejudices and hatred and will give a chance to the primal compassion in human nature to blossom. She convinces Raven to return to the city and create an earthly paradise amidst the ruins. Eager to begin her life afresh, she asks Raven to suggest a new name for herself; she wants a name that "spans my land and yours, India and America, for I belong to both now" (316). This statement sums up her character as well as what the novel is propounding.

As pointed out earlier, the magical element in this novel is associated with a very familiar food ingredient; thus, this novel follows the legacy of magical realist genre as popularized by Salman Rushdie, Laura Esquivel and Gabriel Garcia

Marquez. Divakaruni presents tedious documentation of spices and their respective properties with which the readers are very familiar and in the same vein, she describes their fantastic property. For instance, "Turmeric the preserver, keeping foods safe in a land of heat and hunger. Turmeric the auspicious spice, placed on the heads of new borns for luck, sprinkled over coconuts at *pujas*, rubbed into the borders of wedding saris" (13). And after explaining the nitty-gritty of powdering turmeric, Tilo continues, "When I hold it in my hands, the spice speaks to me. Its voice is like evening, like the beginning of the world. *I am turmeric who rose out of the ocean of milk when the devas and asuras churned for the treasures of the universe. I am turmeric who came after the poison and before the nectar and thus lie in between*" (13). The medicinal value of turmeric accepted even within the rationalist discourse, is clubbed with its mythical properties, followed by turmeric singing the song of its own origin as Tilo powders it. There is no distinction between magical and medicinal values of spices in this narrative; both the 'real' and 'magical' attributes of the spices are depicted familiarly, with minute details. Similarly, Tilo deploys clove and cardamom to help Jagjit in his friendless state,

> Crushed clove and cardamom, Jagjit, to make your breath fragrant. Cardamom which I will scatter tonight on the wind for you. North wind carrying them to open your teacher's unseeing. And also sweet pungent clove, *lavang*, [cardamom] spice of compassion. (39)

Thus, Divakaruni conflates the medicinal and everyday use of clove and cardamom with their magical capacity to evoke compassion. She almost seamlessly merges a familiar truth with an unfamiliar one.

As Wendy B. Faris explicates in her seminal essay, defamiliarization is "the natural or artless recounting of wonders, largely without comment, in a matter-of-fact way, so that they are accepted, presumably, as a child would accept them, without undue questioning or reflection." She explains that paradoxically, magical realist fiction has a detailed presence of the phenomenal world and indulges in detailed description of magical events or things, which makes a "departure from realism" (169). Thus, associating a mundane commodity with magic makes it all the more fascinating. Further, Faris makes an important observation that magical realism is an important postmodernist device that questions the received notion of the concept of time, space and identity (173). Interestingly, Divakaruni uses non-liner narration that oscillates between the spatial setting of Spice Island, Tilo's unnamed home town in India and her "protective shell", i.e., the spice shop in Oakland (58). By doing so Divakaruni tries to legitimize her own version of rationality, thus underpinning the intuitive wisdom of her lot back in India. The novel exploits the trope of magic realism as a political device. In the hands of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, spices and magic become a form of alternate realism. Divakaruni contends that the technique she uses in the novel is her own version of realism, as opposed to the established version. As the author comments in an interview, "I've always been interested in alternate realities and believe that we live in a world where many realities are nestled one within the other" (Interviewed by WaterBridge). She has endowed in the spices the power to heal and harm, to please and to punish, to create and destroy and even reorganize the world order.

As hinted in the novel, spices are undoubtedly a culture specific commodity, acting as identity markers in a multiethnic scenario. Spices – the commodity linked with the Indian kitchens and festivities, gave Indian food a distinct flavour, and

attracted colonizers with their intoxicating aroma. Jack Turner in his interesting book *Spice: The History of a Temptation* (2005), gives spice a Marloweian tribute by calling it "the taste that launched a thousand ships" (3). They remain, nevertheless, the commodity which unleashed colonialism. Timothy Morton in his interdisciplinary work, *The Poetics of Spice: Romantic Consumerism and the Exotic* (2000) has analyzed images of spices in writings of the Romantic Age. According to Timothy Morton, spice is a polyvalent symbol in the material culture. He contends that spices embodied in them the Romantic fetish; to (mis)use his phrase, for the "exotic, erotic and esoteric" (1). The position of spices as a commodity is problematized in the novel. Spices, we may say, allured the West to the East. The entire project of colonialism started due to spices. It is one of the most studied subjects in the cultural materialist discourse. Spices, due to the colonial enterprise, stand for the east. The Orient was always 'spicy' for the Occident. Morton maintains that:

> Spice participates in discourses of spectrality, sacred presence, liminality, wealth, exoticism, commerce and imperialism. It is caught up in, but not limited to, the forms of capitalist ideology... *Spice* is a complex and contradictory marker: of figure and ground, sign and referent, species and genus; of love and death, epithalamium and epitaph, sacred and profane, medicine and poison, Orient and Occident; *and of the traffic between these terms*. (9)

Spices have become a symbol of luxury and surplus capital accumulation and associated with an opulent way of life. Thus, spice very readily evolves into a metaphor for many contradictory things like the east and the west, the rich and the

poor, the colonizer and the colonized and, so forth. Consequently, spices may be said to have changed the history of the world. They are a commodity linked with many worlds simultaneously: the domestic world attributed to women, the world of kitchen secrets and love charms, and the enclosed domain whose total control had been the only possible dream for women since centuries. Concurrently, they are associated with the man's world of trade and commerce, with imperialism, with international export and more recently, with globalization. Spices induced so much warfare and oppression, that they came to be associated with the rich and the powerful. Although, spices season countless palates in the Western world, they remain the signifier of the exotic east. The colonial connotations associated with spices have not yet subsided, but have taken very potent, racist implications in the postcolonial scenario. The export of spices from the Indian subcontinent to the Western world is rampant till date. The demand comes not only from the 'original' inhabitants of the Western world, but the expatriates / immigrants whose culinary habits remain unchanged despite their adopting the language and sartorial practices of the host country. This novel derives heavily from the folk myths and beliefs about the medicinal/magical usages of spices. As Divakaruni states in an interview, in Indian folk belief, "spices are used for more than flavorings. They have magical powers all their own, and they provide remedies for physical maladies as well as cures for spiritual ills. You have to be careful how you use the spices, since their misuse can be dangerous. If you don't follow their rules, the spices can destroy you" (Marcus). Spices are not only used in cooking and home remedies, the real power of the spices is unleashed when Tilo soaks them with magical chants. Each spice has a certain distinct flavour, aroma and a unique character. Spices, as depicted in the novel, are not entirely devoid of colonial connotations. They are linked with magic

and sorcery – dark arts from the exotic east. However, relating magic with spices serves another purpose, the postcolonial self-empowerment sought by the author. Divakaruni uses spices as a commodity enabling empowerment of the entire community in their rites of passage in America. Spices shield them from racism, they protect them against the threat of cultural hegemony and also help them to accept the new culture with ease, without being overwhelmed by it. Hence, spices become a counter hegemonic tool for the immigrants. In addition to this, spices also affect the lives of American customers visiting the store. Undoubtedly, the spices provide the Americans with what they desire, thereby co-opting them into the world-view that the former symbolize. The consumption of the spices facilitates the consumer's subservience to what the spices stand for.

Spices are shown as having multiple significations in the novel, the Indian immigrants perceive spices as a commodity which links them to their mother land and for the non-Indian customers the spices pander to the image of exotic Indian food. (For instance, Kwesi, who buys Indian ingredients from Tilo's shop in order to cook Indian food for impressing his female friend.) Ashis Nandy's comment on exotic cuisine in one of his essays, holds true also for Tilo's spice shop, it is "alien that is familiar and the exotic that is accessible" for its non-Indian customers (3). On the other hand, it plays a pivotal role in the lives of its Indian customers; spices are their necessity as well as means to satisfy their nostalgic excess. Ranging from Lalita, a poor ship yard guard's wife, who buys minimum grocery after payday to the bougainvillea girls, who buy the most expensive packages from the shop - all have a significant place for spices in their lives as well as their palates. Spices are among those elusive commodities that exemplify the proverbial - one woman's exotic is the other woman's necessity.

In the novel the discourse of spices is problematized. On the one hand, spices are 'mastered' by a female incidentally called 'Mistress', rendering an unmistakably colonial 'master – slave' flavour. Simultaneously, the 'Mistress' is dictated by the whimsical spices; paradoxically implying that she is actually not the Mistress but a slave of the spices. The normative master – slave relationship is subverted by the spices and eventually the spices are empowered. Spices, as the First Mother says, symbolize tradition. Tradition is inherited generation after generation; and with tradition comes knowledge. Spices and their magical/medicinal use are part of that knowledge. The pedagogy prevalent in the Spice Island is actually based on prototypical *gurukul* - the ancient Indian school. The knowledge is imparted systematically from the guru to students. Although the sacred orality of the Indian tradition is upheld (as the knowledge of spices is imparted orally), the paradigm of the Indian *gurukul* is partially inverted, insofar as the knowledge providing guru and the students, are all females. Tradition is resistant to change and spices being a material manifestation of tradition put up resistance too. Spices are as rigid as the monolithic traditions they belong to. Spice, John Thieme and Ira Raja write, "was central to the economic commodification of South Asia as a part of the colonial project." (xxxi). Further, they rightly point out that one should not be ignorant of the fact that spice and its symbolism have a much longer history. The First Mother and her knowledge which she imparts to the novices is one of the instances where the history of spices is situated in a timeless, unchronicled cultural past. This pre-colonial past of spices makes the West and its stereotypical colonial analyses of the East redundant. According to Thieme and Raja, the novel is no doubt a form of "post colonial cosmopolitanism" (Thieme and Raja xxxi) where in spite of seeking Westernized readership the complexity of spice names and their significance is

retained without annotations contrary to the alleged foot-note school of diasporic Indian writings. Divakaruni uses the tropology of spices for "strategic exoticism" (Thieme and Raja xxxi). Furthermore, it may be added that images of Indian spices do not reinforce oriental stereotypes but are agents, which empower immigrant population to survive on the cultural margins of an alien country. As Ketu H Katrak asserts, "Marginal cultural productions are capitalized on in today's marketplace" (197). As the capitalizing agencies are still situated in the west, the non-west has to retain its identity without being alienated. The cosmopolitan post colonialism gives the opportunity to the margins through the multicultural market to propagate their culture. It is possible to view this as a two way process of how the first world fetish is willing to incorporate the global culture in its cosmopolitan cultural fold; and the non–West approves of it because of economic and social validation. But the novel suggests that there is more to what the east gives to the west than just the consumable matter. The marginal culture does not merely provide the immediate cultural gratification for the mainstream, cosmopolitan culture; it also provides the spiritual capital, which Divakaruni fictionalizes in her novel. This spiritual capital heals the wounded, purges the guilt stricken, mitigates the pain of the scarred national consciousness and brings hope to the despairing community. Fortunately, spices don't just indulge in beatific activities because at times the wrath of spices can shake the foundation of the civilization. We can conclude that spices, which symbolise India, are an indispensable ingredient of any multiracial society. Tilo's spice shop dispenses aid to its customers. She being the "architect of the American Dream" (28) eases her customers during their rites of passage. Customers come to the Spice Bazaar either for buying the essentials or to gaze at the exotic commodities exhibited. Tilo is a familiarizing agent, who bridges the gap between the complex

culinary science of India and the American fast food consumption culture. Spice Bazaar thrives and is frequented even by non- Indians due to this cultural propaganda. And Tilo, by the use of the spices, enables her customers to be happy. Her spice shop is thus metaphoric of the Indian presence in the world. The shop is constructed as microcosmic India and the spices in the shop function as spiritual ingredients, which initiate the healing process. Multiculturalism and the ensuing problems, which cannot be solved by first world rationalism, can be solved by spices. Spices thus become the Indian way of constructing the multicultural world in the post colonial era by co-opting the Western consumerism.

All the problems addressed in the novels are solved by Tilo's art of administering spices. It is undeniable that the novel seems to take on metafictional dimensions. There are numerous analogies between Tilo and her maker, Divakaruni, the obvious one being that both are expatriates. Quite notably, Tilo addresses the myth of 'mystic India' through her spice-magic shop, while Divakaruni does the same by her writing. Tilo's spices are therapeutic, so is Divakaruni's writing. Undoubtedly, fictionalising traumatic experiences is cathartic. Tilo gives a pinch of sandalwood powder to Haroun and asks him to rub it on his palm, as he narrates his woeful past. "'Hush', I said, willing away the old lines from his palm setting his sorrows free into the dim air of the store. His sorrows circling and circling above our heads to find a new home as all released sorrows must" (27). Thus, writing releases sorrows too; the circular rubbing of the palm corresponds to non-linear narration, where yearning for the past and fear for the future merges with the uncertain present. It is evident that Tilo's role as a reliever coincides with Divakaruni's role. Tilo with her powers divines the predicament of her tired and tattered lot, while Divakaruni senses these problems through her insight as a creative writer. Both the women work

with their intuitive power; one mitigates pain through the medium of spices and the other through the medium of words.

At a preliminary glance one would feel that the images of spices and magic in the novel create an aestheticized and essentialized image of India. Nevertheless, the foregoing discussion has established that the spices far from adhering to the colonial connotations bring forth new symbols of empowering the 'natives' in the postcolonial scenario. Tilo, the main spice of the novel, rebels against the obsolete rules of the Eastern world drawing inspiration from the American cult of individualism, and fights against cultural homogenization in America by upholding the Indian ethos. Tilo truly stands for the amalgamation of the east and the west, privileging the spiritual aspect of the east. The union of Tilo and Raven hints at the formation of the new world order; where the Tilos and the Ravens of the world are part of the mainstream rather than being relegated to the margins. The novel does not advocate abandoning traditions but it underpins a progressive ideology of accommodating the old with the new, the east with the west; nevertheless privileging the eastern worldview over the established norms of the rationalistic western worldview. It upholds deep-rooted multiculturalism and envisions a probable alternative power structure wherein the members of the marginalized community in America come together with their shared knowledge of ancient wisdom. Divakaruni's inclination towards her land of origins is evident as she has presented spices as one of the most empowering symbols of the Indian immigrant community.

THE QUEEN OF ARTS

Divakaruni's *Queen of Dreams* is yet another story depicting the Indian immigrants torn between the mores of the new country and the traditions of the land

they have left behind. This novel narrates the story of the first generation emigrants, as well as the problems of acculturation faced by their children. Gustatory and alimentary images predominate in this novel too. The novel also focuses on the lives of immigrants amidst the unsettling reality of racial attacks hurled on some communities after 9/11 in the America. In this novel Divakaruni not only looks at food as a consumable item, but also as a commodity that has to be marketed and catered to according to the demand of the customers. The commercial aspects of food are presented along with the domestic ones. Food symbolizes a particular community, at the same time acts as a marker of individual emotion. The characters navigate and anchor themselves within the geographical, political and psychological space through the rudder of food. Just as spices are an inseparable commodity for the Indian immigrants, Indian food becomes an agency shaping the identities of the community per se, in addition, affecting the 'mainstream' population of America. In this section, I will analyze the culinary images and the role of food in the lives of immigrants, as well as delve into the politics of consumption of 'ethnic' food in America.

The novel is richly embedded with discourses on different arts, including dream telling, music, painting and cookery. Mrs Gupta, the titular character of the novel, is a dream interpreter. However, the novel is largely about Rakhi, Mrs Gupta's divorced daughter and a single mother. Divakaruni has employed the narrative style of multiple perspectives, the dominant voice being that of Rakhi's. The narrative alternates between the present and distant past, between passages from Mrs. Gupta's dream journals and generous interventions by the omniscient narrator. The language of the novel is poetic, and as her earlier novels, Divakaruni with a detectable nativist bent, uses many Bengali words without bothering to give the

corresponding translations. The novel oscillates between different planes of reality – of the every day challenges faced in contemporary America, and the magical art of dream interpretation from India. The story brings the reader unequivocally from the daily problems of Rakhi's life, to the secret magical domain of Mrs Gupta's life. Divakaruni manages to jump effortlessly, from one level of the story to another. Interestingly, she does not fully solve the mystery shrouding the death of Mrs. Gupta and identity of the mysterious man behind the incident.

Rakhi craves to be like her mother, and unlike other second generation emigrants, is instinctively attracted to the image of India. She indulges in abstract impressionist paintings. And Sonny, Rakhi's vibrant ex-husband is a popular DJ, with music as his passion. Then there is alcoholic Mr. Gupta, who is propelled into action after Mrs. Gupta dies – he cooks as well as sings in his daughter's eating joint Kurma House. He saves Rakhi's business by suggesting to her to serve her customers with 'authentic' Indian dishes. His cookery brings about communal affiliation of people belonging to various ethnic groups. And throughout the novel, the author is preoccupied drawing parallels between different art forms, legitimizing each as different individual modes of expressions. In the course of the novel, Rakhi and Mr. Gupta understand and sympathize with the deceased Mrs.Gupta's vocation of dream interpretation. The father translates his wife's Dream Journals for his daughter. The reading brings together the father and the daughter and gives them a new perspective of life. After the jolt of 9/11, Rakhi's disintegrated family unites.

The novel works at various levels – at one level, it's a strong political statement issued by the author voicing protest against the communities targeted after 9/11 in America. Moreover, at another level, like *The Mistress of Spices*, it brings

the realm of magic and the supernatural to the readers. There is an unmistakable parallel between the spice island of *The Mistress of Spices* and the caves in the *Queen of Dreams,* the knowledge of dream telling is dispensed by senior women to the younger novices. The enclosed atmosphere at the caves has close resonances to the walled space within the kitchen. The caves may be viewed as the female space where the most intuitive science viz., of dream interpretation, is being taught. Here, the author falls into the trap of essentializing intuitiveness on the gender lines. In addition to the kitchen sphere, where traditionally the women's activities were largely restricted, the caves stand for the primordial symbol of the feminine, i.e., the womb. The dark, secretive, sacred kitchen space was shared only by women of the household. The kitchen was the space which women owned and had the right to restrict the access of the outsiders. The caves followed the same kind of secrecy and sacrosanctity in kind if not in degree. In the protective folds of the caves, the novices experience timelessness as they evolve into adept dream interpreters. They also had to vow life long celibacy before entering the caves as trainees. Young Mrs. Gupta is one of the sincere trainees at the cave. However, a chance meeting with a young singer at Calcutta's Victoria Memorial, makes her break all the oaths she had willingly taken. After migrating to America with her newly wed husband, she realizes the magnanimity of her decision. She loses her power of dreams and rapidly grows dissatisfied with her marriage. When she is all prepared to go back to India secretly, she discovers her pregnancy. Eventually, she decides to deliver the child, resigns herself to her fate of living in the new land sans her only skill – dream interpretation. During her pregnancy, she perceives a tiny portion of her erstwhile power returning to her, which she believes will leave her if she sleeps with her husband. Thus, Mrs. Gupta sacrifices her marital life for the sake of her art.

Resultantly, her husband, who is totally unaware of her gift, is disgruntled throughout his marital life. He loses his amiable personality and becomes an erratic alcoholic.

Rakhi is fascinated by her mother; she knows about her mother's profession and desires to follow the same. She lacks the intuitiveness required to be a dream interpreter. This makes Rakhi suffer a complex throughout her life, she feels that she had failed herself by not being able to fashion herself like her mother. She is different from other children of the immigrants in her predilection for everything Indian. Although her father informs her about the filth of the Calcutta monsoon, and her mother maintains that India is not as beautiful as is believed, Rakhi aspires to know more about India. Belle is neither interested to know about India as Rakhi is nor is she fascinated by it. Unlike Rakhi, she tries to disown her 'Indianness'. Despite this difference, they embark on a shared venture, a food joint they christen Chai House. The name of this food joint is a little misleading. It does not serve any authentic Indian recipes. At its best, it is a kitschy effort to cater to the demand of the exotic food by the American consumers. The menu includes muffins of different flavours, Danishes, cookies called "Delhi dietbusters", bread, along with coffee and tea (24). With mainstream American food items on the menu, Belle asserts that the uniqueness of her joint is because it is "Homestyle, but with more style than home ever had" (26). The Chai House runs reasonably well, as Rakhi and Belle create a warm, familiar environment for their customers, who are mainstream Americans from the neighbourhood. Though neither Rakhi nor Belle is a great cook, they manage their enterprise very well. Rakhi is emotionally attached to the shop as it enabled her to procure the custody of her only child, Jona, after her divorce to

Sonny. This shop made her financially independent. Both the women construct this place through their creativity:

> Belle and I put everything we had into the Chai House – all our creativity as well as whatever little money we possessed – and converted a run-down establishment into something special. We painted the walls ourselves in shades of peach ...I'd refinished them [twin maple rockers] in the long evenings that followed my divorce, and it seemed to me that they still smelled of that time, that sad mix of freedom and fear. (25)

In addition to the interior decoration, she adorns her shop with her own paintings. The shop is Rakhi's personal space, which manifests different aspects of her art, viz., her cookery, her managerial skills and her own paintings. She confesses that during the bout of loneliness and after her divorce, this shop was something "tangible" for her to hold on to (26). From the realm of domesticity, cookery is taken to the commercial world. Rakhi, a homemaker who used to cook for her husband, cooks for her customers after her divorce in order to gain financial independence. Food invigorates Rakhi, it brings hope and optimism in her life, so much so that she says, "As long as there's fresh bread in this world, things can't be beyond repair" (24). Rakhi in a way earns her bread through bread! Similarly, when Chai House is on the brink of closing down, Belle envisions her future. She is certain that without any income of her own, she would be married off to a person of her parents' choice and after ten years she will be "shrouded in fat and a polyster salwaar kameez, a passel of snot-nosed brats hanging onto my duppata, rolling out makkhi ki rotis for all my in-laws –" (30). Her imagined future in a traditional household is distasteful to her; she prefers serving her customers for money, instead of serving her in-laws.

Serving for economical reasons is more appealing to her than as a quid pro quo for shelter, in a marital setup. The food joint earns Belle the independence she desired. She requests her parents to invest the money they were saving for her wedding, in the Chai House. One observes that Belle breaks with the tradition by utilizing the funds saved for her marriage and empowering herself financially, thus she avoids the bondages of the family conventions. It is worth noticing, that though normativity of the kitchen space as being a feminine space is maintained, a kitchen of sorts enables Belle to challenge the traditional notion of the kitchen. Thus, the semiotics of the kitchen empowers the women owning the Chai House.

Rakhi's life, "colored with commonplace hues" (47) is disturbed, when the food chain giant Java opens an outlet just opposite the Chai House. Java is a generic form of the McDonald's' culture in the United States. We are informed that Java is "notorious for its policy of opening new stores in the vicinity of existing coffee shops and luring away their customers with low-priced specials and freebies" (29). In the open market, which the United States prides itself on, the dominant rule is, big fish eating the small fish. With corporate giants entering the scenario, the business becomes tougher for the small-scale business houses. Such ventures, like Rakhi's and Belle's Chai House, are doomed due to corporate take over. Belle recalls the interview of Java's CEO, ad verbatim, that within three years of its inception, Java has captured sixty-seven percent of the market in America. The CEO boasts, "That's nothing ... we are aiming for one hundred percent." This interview resonates with the remark of McDonald's chairman in 1994, "Our goal: to totally dominate the quick service restaurant industry worldwide...I want McDonald's to be more than a leader. I want McDonald's to dominate" (qtd. in Ritzer, 232). George Ritzer states that McDonalds has come to symbolize America and has influenced franchises of all

types and cultures around the world, this according to him is 'McDonaldization'. He maintains,

> Eating fast food at McDonald's has certainly become a "sign" that, among other things, one is in tune with the contemporary lifestyle. There is also a kind of magic or enchantment associated with such food and their settings...In short, McDonald's has succeeded because it offers consumers, worker, and managers efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control [through non human technology]. (235)

Java, like McDonald's, seems to inculcate all the success formula for a xenophobic population that prefers familiar food at similar looking places. Fear or distrust towards people is manifest best by the unwillingness or suspicion towards their food. Thus, it is believed that eating is an act of ultimate trust (Sceats, 2). A standardized, machine prepared food, avoids discomfort arising from surprise (Ritzer, 239).

In the novel, the effect of the new shop is immediate, Rakhi and Belle lose their customers and their business comes to a stand still. They try to add new features to their Chai House, so that it becomes as attractive as Java. They plan a trip to Java along with Mrs. Gupta. Rakhi is awestruck at its newness. She looks around the café and observes,

> Java demands nothing from them [the customers] except their money. It allows them to remain unknown. No conversation, no contact, nothing to look or discuss, nothing of themselves exchanged or exhaled[...]While we, with our homemade cookies and custom-ordered coffees, our hand-finished furniture and silk puppets, our bulletin board chronicling our customers'

> lives – we've insisted that the Chai House be noticed. That our customers allow us into their lives just as we've invited them into ours. That our shop stays with them even after they leave it. We've believed that places shouldn't become clones of other places. We've believed that it's important for people to have a venue to enjoy intelligent conversation and a well brewed cup of tea. Have we built our entire business on an illusion? Have we wasted our time in creating a refuge when all people want is a stop-'n'-go? (95)

Somehow, Rakhi's observation about Java's providing service with an impersonal professionalism reflects the service culture as influenced by McDonald's. And the cloak of anonymity on the part of the management creates a non-penetrative space for the diners, which is very different from Chai House's warm hospitability. Java is based on clear ideas about people's expectations, while Chai House is based on the owners' fantasy about India. Despite being called Chai House, its mood and menu is American. After a visit to Java, Mrs. Gupta realizes that the joint should have a spirit of its own, rooted in the culture of the caterers. She suggests that Rakhi and Belle should rework on the Chai House, as "This isn't a real cha shop...but a mishmash, a Westerner's notion of what's Indian. Maybe that's the problem. Maybe if you can make it into something authentic, you'll survive" (99). Marketing authenticity could enable Chai House to withstand competition from Java. Unfortunately, Belle and Rakhi could not implement Mrs. Gupta's suggestions, as within a week Mrs. Gupta dies in a car accident. After few months of low business, the owners decide to close down their labour of seven years. Surprisingly, Mr. Gupta who comes to accompany his daughter to help her in the inventory offers to cook for the hungry team with the remaining ingredients. Rakhi, who hardly knows her father well, is taken aback by his new role as a cook. He quickly prepares delicious pakoras and ginger tea

eliciting lot of compliments. Mr. Gupta, who played an insignificant role in bringing up Rakhi, surprises her by offering to invest as well as to cook in the doomed Chai House. It is only then that he reveals about his childhood, when he worked as an assistant in a snack shop to support his education back in India. Ultimately, they plan to reopen the Chai Shop in a new avatar, as a real Indian snack shop modeled after Mr. Gupta's childhood workplace, obviously, "with a few American sanitary touches thrown in" (185). The muffins and cookies give way to, "pakora, singara, sandesh, jilebi, beguni, nimki, mihidana" (185). Although a skeptic, Rakhi could not help being fascinated by her father's sudden metamorphosis from a reserved alcoholic into a chef par excellence. Mr. Gupta brings with him the authenticity that Mrs. Gupta had suggested after her visit to Java. This food joint, now called Kurma House, is actually a reaction against McDonaldization of the service sector. According to Ritzer, after McDonald's affected the food industry, there was mushrooming of eating joints with home style cooking (241). The standardization of the palate which McDonaldization brought about, made food lovers look for newer tastes and avenues, and hence flourished the ethnic food market in the United States – Chinese, Mexican, European, Indian and so on. Though adapted according to the American taste buds, these outlets underscore the fact that the food manufactured is prepared as a likeness to that made back in the corresponding country. The Indian ethnic food phenomenon was first witnessed in the U.K., where Bangladeshi owners of the 'Indian' restaurants concocted what is now celebrated as the national dish of the U.K., i.e., Chicken Tikka Masala. (Cook) Similarly, high immigration rates in America gave impetus to the ethnic food industry. The ethnic food industry can also be considered as an offshoot of the phenomenon that Warren Belasco calls "food

counterculture" of the 1960-70. This phenomenon was neo-bohemian. Belasco identifies the underlying ideologies of this counterculture:

> A consumerist theme targeted foods to be avoided, especially chemicalized "plastic" foods. A therapeutic theme had to do with positive concerns for pleasure and identity, particularly a hunger for craftsmanship, leisure, and tradition. Concerned with the integration of self, nature, and commodity, an organic motif addressed serious issues of production and distribution, that is, how to reconcile private consumption with wider planetary needs. (220)

The ethnic food joints directly respond to the above mentioned therapeutic theme, exemplified by the need of identifying tradition with food. The food cooked traditionally connects nostalgia of a different space and time. It has an element of novelty; also, it carries an assurance that ethnic food consumption will add a feather in the consumer's multicultural cap. Mr. Gupta wants to publicize the new version of the Chai Shop as an undiluted variant of the teashops back in India. Hence, he aims to cater to the "deep-rooted multiculturalists" (Fish). At the reopening, Mr. Gupta forbids Belle from writing the description of the food items for the sake of the customers, he is adamant, "No pandering to tourist types here...This is a real cha shop. If people ask, you can explain."(202-203) Mr.Gupta's remark refers to the phenomenon of culinary tourism. Jennie Germann Molz, in her paper, examines the trend of eating ethnic food as a sign of cosmopolitan consumerism. The food adventurers experiment with new kind of food in the restaurants providing foreign ambience to replicate the tourist's experience. She explains, "Relying heavily on associations of food as symbolic of geographical or cultural differences, culinary tourism provides opportunities for tourists to "taste" the Other" (78). The existing

power relation across any ethnic restaurant's table is between the consuming patrons paying for authentic element and the feeder host. Mr. Gupta, a shrewder businessperson than Rakhi and Belle, knows that there are many takers of his brand of authenticity. He has faith in his clientele, and more importantly, faith in his product –authentic Indian food. His refusal to explain the food explains author's, who does not 'translate' the cultural context for the readers.

After Mr. Gupta enters the kitchen of his household as well as that of the Kurma House, he dominates the story. Does Mr. Gupta's expertise in cooking make him an iconoclast male? Alternatively, does it reinforce the stereotype governing the food industry that the world's greatest chefs are men? Mr. Gupta rockets into significance only after his wife dies, his first cooking venture in the book is, when he prepares eggs and toasts for Rakhi. The latter is perplexed as well as irritated at this unexpected display of emotion. Evidently, Mr. Gupta cooks in order to fill the void of a mother figure in Rakhi's life. Cooking and serving are among the most enduring symbols associated with motherhood. By cooking, he exhibits his androgynous nature and implies that he is now ready to stand by his daughter against all odds. In the newly resurrected Kurma House, he cooks numerous things in large quantity, with a professional expertise. Rakhi observes her father cooking with an artistic zeal, "…I watch as he mixes a huge bowl of pakora dough, adds chopped onions, spinach, an assortment of spices. How lovingly his hands gather the besan flour, pour the warm water" (209). This alimentary detail implies that Mr. Gupta's culinary skills challenge normativity because cookery has been perceived as a gendered activity. The fact that Divakaruni devotes passages to Mr. Gupta's dexterity in the kitchen clearly shows that Divakaruni is interrogating the category of cookery as a gendered art. Despite his chivalry and instinct to protect his daughter, as mentioned earlier, he

comes across as an androgynous man, a surrogate mother trying to make up for Mrs. Gupta's death. Parental concern rather than a materialistic intention explains his cooking at the food joint. His familial motive distinguishes him from the league of male chefs who predominate the food service sector. He manages to attract a large number of customers through his food and singing skills. The combination of Indian film songs with Indian snacks becomes an instant success in the neighbourhood. People of Indian origin, as well as of other nationalities enjoy their evenings interspersed with live music and food. Live music performances by Mr.Gupta and his music lover customers become a standard fare at the Kurma House. Henceforth, it gets its distinctive character that the earlier version lacked due to its cultural ambiguity. Entrenched deeply in the traditional art of cookery and music, Kurma House becomes a counter to the modernistic Java. Mr. Gupta's warmth makes people perceive the food joint as a communal space, thus, elevating the Kurma House into the International Kurma House.

Divakaruni has invested a great deal in the signification of food in this novel, which carries multiple connotations. It becomes the symbol of love, token of hatred, reason for suspicion. Food is consumed, prepared, sold, bought, rejected, and wasted in the course of the novel. This novel shows that rejecting food is as significant as accepting food. One of the most interesting food exchanges in the novel takes place when Rakhi, Mrs.Gupta and Belle visit Java House. The white American manager waits upon their table. She attends to their order, and slights her business rival Rakhi. Mrs. Gupta is unnerved by the manager's attention towards Rakhi and exchanges her tea with Rakhi's coffee. Although she dislikes coffee, she gulps down Rakhi's cup making a face, "as though it were an unpleasant but necessary task" (97). Further, Mrs. Gupta even forbids Belle to consume from the complimentary

plate of cookies the manager provides them. The first thing Mrs.Gupta does after returning to the Chai House is detoxifying her system by gargling with salt water. She explains her behaviour, "In life, it's best not to take anything for free –unless it's from someone who wishes you well. Taking places you under obligation. And the coffee –well, maybe I'm just suspicious. But I didn't like the way the manager brought our order over herself. She didn't do it for any of the other customers, if you noticed –" (98). The manager's cannibalistic competitiveness makes her a negative person, and by extension, renders food served by her harmful for her competitors. By consuming the coffee that was meant for Rakhi, her mother saves her from potential evil. Belle fully understands Mrs. Gupta's reason for shielding Rakhi. She relates an incident from her hometown, where a newly wed woman almost died after wearing the sari gifted by her husband's earlier girlfriend. Belle and Mrs. Gupta believe that consuming anything served with evil intent has bad consequences. After Mrs. Gupta's death, Rakhi, who was a non-dreamer, begins dreaming. Rakhi relives the sequence of events at Java in a dream strewn with aquatic imageries,

> The drinks we've ordered come floating through the water at us. The coffee is black as squid ink. I reach for it, but my mother is quicker. She takes my cup in her fragile seahorse hands and drinks. The color seeps into her, staining her like Shiva of the dark throat, who took in the world's poison to save it from destruction. But my mother, well intentioned though she is, is not as strong as a god. She begins to crack apart. Little bits come off her like branches of coral. (101)

Interestingly, the allusion to Shiva, the bearer of poison adds an extra dimension to food consumption. As a Puranic myth goes, when gods and demons were churning

the ocean for nectar of immortality, an infinitesimally huge cauldron of the deadliest poison was emitted by the ocean. Lord Shiva consumed all of it in a sip and thus prevented the world from total devastation. The two opposite aspects of food are revealed in this story. Food can provide pleasures similar to immortality, and on the other hand, it can be as harmful as poison. Two days after drinking the supposedly 'poisonous' coffee, Mrs. Gupta dies in an accident. So readers, along with Rakhi, are convinced of the harmful effect of devouring suspicious food. The same suspicion arises when the manager returns her visit at the now successful Kurma House and wastes the food she orders. Before ordering the food, she asks suspiciously about the ingredients used because she thinks "foreigners sometimes put –uh unusual ingredients in their food" (247). She does not eat the *singara* but squashes it shapeless and pours red chutney over it, which makes it look like a "tiny run-over animal". Rakhi rightly observes, "there's such malice behind this small act of wastefulness" (252). As Tamara S Wagner mentions in her article observing politics of food repulsion in Singaporean and Malaysian diasporic novels "Food is often more symbolic, to be rejected than to be eaten..." (32).The manager's arrival has such a malefic effect that it coincides with kitchen fire at the Kurma House. The entire platter of *singaras* is wasted and kitchen becomes defunct because of the fire. One can see the connection between the manager's destroying *singara* with her intention to destroy Kurma House and everything it stands for. She is metonymic of chauvinism present in the American society; her rejection of the food is actually her intolerance of the way of life that is 'different' from hers.

Food is always an omnipresent metaphor, denominating the personal transactions of love and care. It becomes an omen for auspicious and inauspicious things in life. On the morning of the reopening of the shop, Rakhi is pleased by her

peaceful sleep, which she compares with *rosogulla* syrup (207). The readers get a hint that the new venture would be successful. Similarly, Mrs. Gupta mentions in her dream journal, that different dream interpreters have different symbols, which occur in their dreams. She gives an example of one of the trainees at the cave, who had a sweet tooth, so every good news came to her in the form of a bowl full of *kheer*(275). In addition to being a harbinger of the future, food binds the family together. After her husband's drinking escapades, Mrs. Gupta prepares her husband's favourite dishes. The reader understands later that Mrs. Gupta cooks in order to assuage her guilt of not committing herself completely to their marital relationship. Mrs. Gupta resorts to her culinary skills again to divert her shocked daughter, when young Rakhi makes her confess about her secret profession. She asks Rakhi to decide the dinner menu, and allows the child to help prepare ravioli. Rakhi remarks, "At home we rarely ate anything but Indian; that was the one way in which my mother kept her culture. She had never made ravioli before, but she looked it up in a cookbook. We spent the rest of the afternoon rolling, crimpling, stuffing dough with cheese... we were delighted with ourselves" (8). This alimentary activity brings about reconciliation between the mother and the daughter. Similarly, Sonny and Jona prepare a meal for Rakhi to make her feel better. She is delighted by her ex-husband's efforts, despite hating him. After the traumatic experience of 9/11, Sonny and Rakhi come closer. Rakhi realizes that their relationship is steering towards familial terrains, when she begins inviting Sonny frequently to her place. She feels comfortable with her family only when she is in the kitchen, "...there is warmth to being in her small kitchen, Jona and him and herself crowded around the countertop, chopping green onions, sautéing chicken with ginger" (306). Belle and Jespal's relationship begins when Jespal delivers

homegrown products which the former's parents had sent for Belle. Jespal's traditional Indian upbringing is a contrast to Belle's self-fashioned American cosmopolitanism. He is intrigued by Belle's "vegetable guilt" (176) arising from her inability to cook Indian food. Further, food becomes an object of contention between Sonny and Rakhi, as the latter is jealous that Sonny visits her mother even after their divorce. She is angry at the fact that her mother cooks full course Indian meals for Sonny whereas for her own daughter 'easy to make' Chinese stir-fry. Rakhi applies a simple evaluative logic that more elaborate the food served, more significant it becomes. Thus, food becomes a quantitative marker of affection within the family.

Food also becomes a token of appreciation outside the family, as in the case with Mr. Gupta's decision of doing away with tedious calculation of food items ordered by their customers and setting up an open buffet system as a gesture of gratitude. Mr. Gupta claims he does not like to charge customers for every paltry item they consume by "keeping track of every pakora and jilebi. Can't we ask them to pay a minimum amount and eat what they want?... Honor system...Makes everyone feel trusted, and doesn't disturb the musicians" (268-269). When asked if he did business like this, back in India, Mr. Gupta refuses explaining that they would have been robbed. He insists that this system will work in Kurma House and adds, "we're in a different country, with different people. We can't just follow old ways. We've got to be flexible, no?" (269). Poverty and constant want in India would have bankrupted a snack joint with unlimited buffet system, but the society of surplus and nutritional well being that American is, prevents blatant food theft. Although Kurma House is modeled on the prototypical tea house in India, Mr. Gupta changes his business strategy according to time and place. Though the author is acutely conscious of the lack of sufficient food in India, she portrays characters like the old

tea stall owner who is renowned for his culinary skills and stinginess both. He not only teaches Mr.Gupta the subleties of cookery but also provides young Mr. Gupta with milk daily. Offering food seems to have a positive connotation worldwide; food exchange not only strengthens the family ties, but also spreads benevolence amongst strangers despite poverty, thereby making the world a better place to live in.

As mentioned earlier, this novel is preoccupied with discourse on different arts. Each important character in the novel is associated with a different art form and seems to personify a creative medium. Mr. Gupta, a closet cook, prepares snacks of various kinds and doles out his food with his songs at the eating joint. When he decides to rename the Chai House as Kurma House, Rakhi argues that kurma is a dinner dish, which they do not intend to serve in their snack shop. He answers, "We are artists, Rakhi,... Must we be bound to literalities?" (203). He considers himself as an artist, and perceives his cookery as an art rather than a skill. Therefore, he indulges in 'poetic licence' allotted to the artists. Here, the author has conflated the more conventional art forms like painting and music, with the lesser-acclaimed art forms like cookery. By grouping all these together, Divakaruni indicates that she wants cookery to be considered as a serious art form.

The characters speak to one another as fellow artists. In one of the artistic discussions presented in this book, Rakhi tries to explain about her art to Sonny, "How at a certain moment the colors take over the eyes, the hands. How she must surrender her body to their rhythm. How, until the movement is done, nothing else matters" (13). She doesn't expect Sonny to understand, however, he surprises her by murmuring, "It's like being in the middle of lovemaking, isn't it?" (13). Rakhi is shocked at the exactness of the comparison. This romanticized stance on art does not

merely pertain to music; it encompasses all the arts discussed in the novel, including the art of writing. We are told that Mr. Gupta translates his deceased wife's dream journals, and like any translator, he fears there would be something lost in translation. The Bengali that Mrs. Gupta uses is a little archaic and her style a little challenging to be translated into English. As the novel proceeds, Mr. Gupta produces quicker translations of the journal entries for his only prospective reader, his daughter. However, he is perennially worried if he is doing 'justice' to her writings, which is undoubtedly a universal concern with the translators. So, writing is also one of the arts addressed in this novel. This brings us to the analogy between art of writing the novel and writing within the novel. Divakaruni's statements on creative process through several artists in the novel confirm that she wants to comment on the nature of her own art. Most of the observations on different arts made in this novel, also applies to the art of writing fiction. Hence, the discourse on painting, composing music, dancing and cooking serves a metafictional purpose. Rakhi, a mediocre cook, and a non-dreamer, is a professional painter. She rationalizes her creativity with her tendency to brood over the past, and compares it with that of her mother's optimism for the future, "Perhaps this is why she dreams and I paint. Because dreams look to the future, and paintings try to preserve the past" (35). She paints part time, as she also has to take care of her daughter and her Chai House. She is bothered by petty problems of her mundane life; thus, she believes, "Life gets in the way of art" (15). The conflict of choosing between art and life rips apart her mother's life too. Mrs. Gupta dreams at the cost of her husband and her daughter. She prioritizes her profession over her family. Rakhi constantly juggles with the same problem; she wishes for uninterrupted painting sessions but has to accommodate her full time motherly duties. The banality of life disturbs

writers, and especially women writers. Normatively, women are expected to handle more domestic responsibilities than men do. Divakaruni foregrounds the predicament of women artists, who have to negotiate and contest for their creative spaces in their own households. For them, the struggle for the metaphorical and literal "room of one's own" is far from over, as shown in the course of this novel.

The problems of space for women artists is the theme analyzed in *Herspace: Women, Writing and Solitude* (2003), where several writers respond to the idea of privacy that any creative activity demands. Virginia Woolf's was the one of the earliest advocates for a private room for women's artistic pursuit. Interestingly, Rakhi is expected to create amidst the commonplace commotion of her daily life. This alternative idea of pursuing creativity, on the one hand seems to be feeding on the superwoman myth, and on the other, seems to explore a post-feminist angle of accommodating instead of contesting differences. Rakhi tries to grapple with the problem of space, and ultimately she grows professionally, her personal problems notwithstanding. Divakaruni seems to suggest that women artists have to put in extra efforts in order to delicately balance life and art, without letting the former obstruct the latter. Interestingly, Divakaruni was a painter herself, as she reveals in an interview (WaterBridge) and understands the significance of privacy in an artist's life. One can infer that Rakhi's artistic conflicts are scarcely disguised problems faced by Divakaruni herself. She is summing up her experience as a creative writer in this novel. Meanwhile, upholding the category of cookery, she implies that like writing, translating, composing music, or painting – making food is an art.

Sonny is passionate about music, and becomes a successful DJ due to his Bhangra compositions. Through Sonny, the author presents the South Asian music

scenario in the United States. Youths from the South Asian origins parade their ethnicity through remixed Indian music in the discotheques. Like his ex-spouse, Sonny caters to this hybridized culture because of the demand, the difference being that he serves music while Rakhi serves food. His brand of ethnicity is more commercialized than Rakhi's. Whilst Rakhi's customers expect authentic food, Sonny's customers know that the music which is being played is hybridized, arising out of fusion between two disparate cultures, i.e., the mixture of the American discotheque culture and Indian folk music. Nevertheless, ethnicity on demand is the tagline of the products sold by South Asians to fellow nationals and other groups, be it music or food. The 'ethnic' youth creates a counterculture of their own by contesting and simultaneously drawing from the 'traditional' culture as ingrained by the earlier generation, and the adapted American culture. In her critique of Indian American youth culture, Sunaina Marr Maira maintains,

> This popular culture is a critical site for understanding how second generation youth are positioning themselves in the landscape of ethnic and racial politics, because it showcases performances of ethnic authenticity, cultural hybridity, racialized gender ideologies, and class contradictions. I argue that in remix youth culture, the politics of nostalgia is infused into the production of "cool", a dialectic that has revealing implications for understanding processes of ethnicization and racialization among second-generation youth in the United States and for notions of essentialism and subversion in cultural theory. (38)

The novel provides a glimpse into the night culture of the brown youth of America. Donning ethnic wares and hand embroidered Indian shirts with jeans, the youth

flock to the discotheques that play remix Hindi film songs and Bhangra beats. This alternative culture is located in between the broad rubrics of American and Indian culture. Ethnic food, ethnic music, ethnic paintings are different modes of cultural productions responding to the market phenomenon of demand and supply. In addition to the marketability of these cultural products, they legitimize the hybrid identity of the makers. According to Rakhi, who is an outsider, the entire pursuit is escapist. Interestingly, people of ethnic origins find comfort in this make belief world of the ethnic nightclub; displaying ethnic identity becomes a fashion statement as well as a space celebrating alterity in the society upholding mainstream practices. Dance and music culture is an extension of the self-perpetuating instincts of the immigrant groups in the hegemonic society, seeking to homogenize differences. An example is Mrs.Gupta preparing Indian food on a daily basis in her household in order to keep her culture alive. Similarly, 'Indian' discotheques attempt to do the same. Indian cookery abroad, as Ray rightly points out, is the marriage between the demand and availability of ingredients, hence, giving rise to an unavoidable fusion (188-189). Similarly, music too is a fusion mingling the American musical experience with the Indian. Through different art forms, Divakaruni tries to present to us the cultural choices that various characters make; Rakhi paints on Indian themes, Mr. and Mrs. Gupta enjoy cooking Indian dishes, Sonny composes Indian music though they are all settled in America. How these characters perceive India and what they understand by 'Indianess' is a debatable issue, but it is noteworthy that India remains in the artistic consciousness of the characters. Moreover, every artistic experience of these characters is to locate themselves with reference to India, their land of origin, and America, their land of settlement. Importantly, none of the characters harbors a desire to return to India for good, they flaunt their American

identity along with their emotional transactions with India. Neither do they intend to end the famous immigrant angst by returning to their 'roots', nor do they wish to immerse themselves completely within the American culture. They reconstruct their subjectivities constantly, by belonging to both the nations but adhering strictly to none. They facilitate the production of food from/of India in America, furthermore, unhesitatingly partake in the consumption of mainstream American food. Food becomes the immigrants' tool of resistance, strategy of subversion and the agency of perpetuation.

In both the works discussed in this chapter, an attempt has been made to highlight how food influences the lives of the immigrant community. In the first novel, the spices and in the second, Indian food become identity markers as well as empowering motifs for the community. Divakaruni has successfully used the tool of magical realism and food images for summing up the experiences of Indian immigrants in America. She presents a gradual journey of immigrant subject towards a critical assimilation. It is clear from the foregone analysis that her characters do not blindly accept American culture or decry their indigenous heritage but uphold their origin. Furthermore, various orthodox Indian social strictures and taboos are questioned and discarded through the intervention of food. Anita Mannur criticizes Divakaruni's brand of exoticism and charges it for catering the essentialist imaginings. However, it has been contended in this study that Divakaruni's upholding food and magic empowers the community. Though in the orientalist's discourse, India has been associated with occult arts and spicy food, Divakaruni reinvents their significance in her works. In the postcolonial scenario, food and magic imported from India renegotiate power in America. Indian grocery stores and Indian eateries not only cater to the nostalgia of the diasporic Indian community but

also serve the mainstream populace of America and in doing so, minimize the differences amongst various groups. Even if the plot in both the novels is fraught with magical elements, we have observed that the author presents everyday reality of life through food. Divakaruni uses food images to react strongly against racial abuse in America. Food and spices become identity markers for the immigrants. Although food is the site of differences, it enables commingling of different cultures through sharing. The immigrant population draws strength and sustenance from food and magic and furthermore, utilizes them to arm itself socially and thereby strengthen its identity. Hence, once its native identity is strengthened through food, the immigrant group combats racism and becomes liberal enough to assimilate partially into the mainstream culture of America. For Divakaruni, food co-opts the best of both the worlds and moulds the immigrant subjects, especially women, into the social fabric of America.

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CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

I eat my culture

— Svati Shah,"Lunch Vignettes"(118)

Male migrant authors engage with macro concerns regarding imaginary homelands, affiliations as a national or transnational identity of a dual passport holder and would probably not notice the fusion and confusion of cultural identities that, for example, a lunch of 'pasta with tandoori chicken', served to a visiting Asian woman faculty at an Australian university guest house, can cause.

— Sanjukta Dasgupta, "Locating 'Home' in a Liminal Space" (82)

The present study has been an endeavor to unravel the relationship between food and identity through the selected fictional works of three Indian diasporic/Bengali American/Asian American women writers viz., Bharati Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. The signification of food images in the authors and their six fictional works has been discussed individually in the foregoing chapters. All the texts fictionalize about Indian immigrant identity in America vis-à-vis food and its consumption. This chapter briefly recapitulates the foregoing analysis and reiterates the overarching argument of this study. The chapter focuses on juxtaposing differences and similarities in the manner in which food images are employed by these authors and finally, it hints at the future implications of this study.

Of the two quotations which function as epigraphs to this chapter, the first one is taken from Svati Shah's poem "Lunch Vignettes" (1998) where the persona ventures for a Gujarati lunch at an ethnic restaurant in America. She imagines that she would be 'thrown out' because of her unorthodox appearance, but to her surprise

she receives a warm reception. She "eats" her culture at the ethnic restaurant. Does this enhance her sense of 'Indianness'? Or does it leave her more confused, all the more straddled between two cultural choices? Or else does it satiate her tourist like curiosity to know her original culture? The answers to these rhetorical questions lie in the fact that food consumption per se, and ethnic food consumption in particular, is fraught with many contradictions. Nevertheless, food definitely moulds and marks individual and communal identity.

The second epigraph is taken from Dasgupta's essay on Mukherjee, Lahiri and Divakaruni's connection with Calcutta. Her observation on male writers and their preoccupation with grand political narratives is interesting. She draws on the age old, essentialist roles of gender – men for the field and women for the hearth. While the male writers are engrossed with the important proceedings in the realm of the outside world, the female writers narrativize on things inside the domestic domain, including food. Although the portrayal of food and culinary images in literature is not necessarily a woman writer's domain, nevertheless the connection between gender and food/food writing has been rightly posited by Dasgupta. The women writers strived to develop their own canon as contradistinct from the male canon and thus they focused on the untold stories of the 'inside' world. Food and its signification is thus one of the recent trends in feminist/literary studies.

Food in fiction is inspiring more and more scholarly works which treat food as a system of signification. Cookery, as depicted in the texts under discussion, becomes a cultural marker. This study aimed to establish how the community is identified by the food it consumes. The authors selected for the study are 'ethnic'

authors in America who represent their community in the experience of being 'othered'. According to Heather Latimer,

> The topic of food and eating has been theorized extensively by feminist, cultural, and literary critics who have created scholarship on the connections between subjectivity, the body, and food. Positing that eating is always a social, cultural and psychological act tied to both gender and race, these theorists often maintain that food is the ultimate cultural marker. It therefore follows that many feminists and post-colonialists connect food to theories on difference and "otherness" and often use food metaphors to talk about race. This theoretical link between food and race is also often explored thematically in the literary works of racialized authors and those who write from subject positions at a tangent to dominant communities. Self-identified "ethnic" or "hybrid' authors, these writers explore links between memory, race and eating by writing about the experience of being identified by and "othered" through food.

This study has also analyzed the identity formation in the "racialized" women writers from Indian origin, who try to establish the relationship between "memory, race and eating".

As hinted in the "Introduction" the term 'images' was used in its broadest sense, encompassing all the connotations of the term 'imagery' as delineated by M.H.Abrams in his *Glossary*. It is also noteworthy that these images were employed by the three authors as metaphor, metonym and/or symbol. For example, malt vinegar in Lahiri's "This Blessed House" becomes a metaphor of the Christian presence in the house and the consumption of food cooked with vinegar by Sanjeev

is symbolic of his acceptance of his wife. Further, the consumption of Bengali food in *The Namesake* is presented as a metonym for Bengali identity. Mukherjee uses images of decay as a metaphor of the immigrant's transmutation on entering a new country. Cheesecake in *Wife* becomes a symbol of threat and rejection for Dimple while Jasmine's hybrid cooking becomes metonymic of the fusion of her own identity. Divakaruni has employed one of the most dense images viz., spices, in *The Mistress of Spices*. As discussed in Chapter IV, spices become a plural signifier. Further it was noted that though spices are fictionalized in the postcolonial scenario in the novel, their colonial connotations and a rich prehistory enrich their signification.

The dissertation was arranged in five chapters. In addition to "Introduction" and "Conclusion" chapters numbered two, three and four were devoted to the study of food images in the selected works of Bharati Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni respectively. In the introductory chapter, an overview of scholarly studies on food in culture and literature and a brief review on the corpus of diaspora/immigrant studies was also presented. Furthermore, critical studies on individual authors were discussed. There has been voluminous scholarship on Bharati Mukherjee, the grande dame of diasporic writing, and almost all facets of her work, except the food images in her works, have been studied. The studies on the themes and tropes in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* and *The Namesake* have been discussed. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's works (*Queen of Dreams* in particular) has not received the critical attention they deserve. Moreover, it is clear that there has been no study attempted to understand identity through culinary images presented in the selected works. The culinary images in the selected works were analyzed by various theoretical tools. The objective of this study was not to

undermine the existing scholarship but to trace a theme overlooked by other studies about the selected authors.

Chapter II was entitled "Brewing Body and Food in Bharati Mukherjee" and it delved into the correlation of body and food in Mukherjee's selected works. Both *Wife* and *Jasmine* are replete with images of decay and violence in addition to the culinary images. Mukherjee's preoccupation with mangled bodies and decay can be explained by her own proclamation in *Jasmine* that an immigrant murders herself to become Americanized (29). This self-fashioning is very painful as it entails a systematic erasure of cultural memory and becoming something entirely alien. Similarly, Dimple's deep rooted dissatisfaction with her 'being' and constant longing for 'becoming' makes her transition into America very violent. She murders her husband in a violent frenzy triggered off due to her inability to mould her personality (including her body) according to her wishes. Dimple fetishizes about her body and fantasizes about consumable commodities; hence there is a connection between food, body and identity. The images of decay perforate both the works as an apparition of cultural memories that cannot be destroyed totally. For Dimple this memory is reflected in her routine task of preparing Bengali food and following the mores of the world she thought she has left behind. Similarly Jasmine, as it has been observed, renounces the external markers and peculiarities of her culture. She never resists her renaming, but derives new shades in identity through different names. She learns to carry herself in American clothes, she not only abandons her 'sidle' but also her 'modesty', however, she does not abandon her culinary habits. Her recipes of hybridity try to incorporate the best of both the worlds. She jokes with Bud that she would wait for him to return before dinner because an Indian wife does not eat before her husband. Later when Darrell invites her for dinner, she is hesitant to eat

because "A good Hasnapuri wife doesn't eat because she is hungry. Food is a way of granting or withholding love" (216). Though she plunges into one role/birth from another, she seems to carry forth few relics from her 'past life' and one amongst them is food. Here, Mukherjee seems to undermine her own thesis that an immigrant forgets his past in order to survive in America. This affirms the argument put forth by Lal, "instant cultural transfers" are impossible (159). Food becomes metonymic of that part of the past which will always, and perhaps unwittingly, linger on in an immigrant's life.

Mukherjee is a little critical of the category of cookery though she seems to agree that it is an empowering trope in the racist scenario but does not seem to advocate that kitchen and cookery are empowering for immigrant women. Jasmine's survival tactics help her keep her culture alive, albeit in a tokenistic way, through food preparation. But she constantly yearns for the space outside the domain of the kitchen. She romanticizes about the world outside the kitchen window and dreams of 'hitting the highway' with Taylor. Thus, though food empowers Jasmine to etch out her identity in Baden's community, she discards the world inside for unbridled adventure in the outside world. Similarly, Dimple is portrayed as enjoying cooking, she has a remarkable expertise in preparing Bengali food and her husband seems to love her because of her cookery. But she does not realize the empowering potential of the kitchen because neurosis circumscribes her creative power. Dimple, like countless Indian women, is trained to be demure and to be eager to please. For Dimple cookery is the only way to assert her subjectivity and creativity. But her mental condition worsens due to her loneliness and cultural alienation and ultimately kitchen and food is bereft of any empowering possibility for her. According to Alam, Dimple is "torn between the need to play the role society expects of her and

her need for self-expression." (37). Mukherjee employs food images to empower her characters in a racist scenario – Dimple is happy and confident when she proves her expertise in cookery in the presence of Ina, Milt and other 'sahibs'. Her culinary skills provide her reassurance amidst the unsettling reality of immigrant life. Jasmine, as discussed earlier celebrates hybridity with recipes of fusion of the two worlds. Her 'mator pan' popularizes her in the mainstream America.

The next chapter, entitled, "Eating at Home and Eating Abroad: Lahiri's Diasporic Palate" studied Jhumpa Lahiri's use of culinary images in *Interpreter of Maladies* and *The Namesake*. This chapter explored the political implications of identity as portrayed through food. There is a constant interplay of home and abroad in the selected works and these dichotomous entities are related to each other through food images. The characters re-create a home away from 'home' through cooking a particular type of food, thus they literally 'eat what they are'. Their culinary identities consolidate their cultural identities. The first generation's nostalgia for 'home' is transferred onto the second generation as unease, as exemplified by Gogol. Lahiri's stories in *Interpreter of Maladies* are situated in India, the United States and the United Kingdom, and despite differences in the locale, they narrativizes people who are displaced in one way or the other. Boori Maa who owned a lake full of fish in Bangladesh before partition now eats rice from the pot, or Mrs. Sen who ate fish throughout the year in Calcutta is depressed at the unavailability of fresh fishes in her American town. The displacement and the ensuing alienation are portrayed artistically by Lahiri.

Jhumpa Lahiri presents the Bengali Americans as diasporic subjects who reiterate their identity through the repetitive ritual of cooking and consuming

Bengali food. In *Interpreter of Maladies* food is presented as an alternative medium of communication in addition to being an identity marker. The study contends that *The Namesake* presents culinary images to indicate the incomplete assimilation of the first as well as second generation immigrants. Further, food images are presented as corresponding to the life cycle of the immigrant subject – birth, childhood, youth, marriage, death etc. is delineated through food. In an interview conducted by Mudge, Lahiri reveals:

> Like most of the children of immigrants, I am aware of how important food becomes for foreigners who are trying to deal with life in a new world. Food is a very deep part of people's lives and it has incredible meaning beyond the obvious nutritional aspects. My parents have given up so many basic things coming here from the life they once knew –family, love, connections –and food is one thing that they've really held onto.

In both the fictional works discussed in this chapter, it was observed how Lahiri unraveled myriad signification of food "beyond the obvious nutritional aspects". She not only narrativizes people like her parents but also individuals like herself who participate in armchair nostalgia though they are not directly connected to India. Through the repetitive ritual of food consumption several binaries straddling an immigrant subject's life – home and abroad, past and present, nostalgia and hope for the future, are resolved.

In *Interpreter of Maladies*, we observed how food takes on multiple dimensions. It also indicates a social change in immigrant groups. For example, in atleast two stories "Temporary Matter" and "Blessed House" we observed how men enter the domain of the kitchen to replace their women. This is a very uncommon

practice in bourgeois Indian society, where cookery is a highly gendered act and kitchen has been predominantly a woman's domain. Does this indicate that immigrant group discards its gendered practices and becomes more liberated in America? However, it was also observed that these male characters venture into the kitchen only when women characters are unable to do so, at most, these men replace women temporarily. Thus it cannot be seen as a complete deviance from the norm. Similarly, Gogol who has never learnt to cook at his parents' home learns it only when he shifts to Maxine's house. Thus, he learns a new way of life only when he interacts with the mainstream and is fascinated by their food mores and their life in general and wishes to be like them. He realizes that by confining themselves to the Bengali community his parents have deprived him of something substantial. Lahiri hints that for the first generation food is at its best an attempt to re-create their homeland in the kitchen, while for the second generation it represents a forced identity marker.

The fourth chapter, "Food and Magic: Divakaruni's Recipe of the Immigrant Identity" looked at the intertwining of magic and food in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices* and *Queen of Dreams*. The chapter contended that although the author capitalizes on the widely circulated images of spices, food and magic from India, she derives new implication from the alleged essentialized images. Food and magic are foregrounded as empowering agents for the Indian immigrant community settled in America.

Tilo and Mrs. Gupta are both practitioners of Indian occult arts in America. Tilo uses the magical power of the spices to alleviate lives of Indian immigrants while Mrs. Gupta helps people by interpreting their dreams and foretelling their

future. The chapter analyzed that in Tilo's case food (spices) directly supports the community in its daily struggles; while in the later novel authentic Indian food empowers the community. Both Tilo's spice shop and Rakhi's Kurma House become macrocosm of the Indian presence in America. The store and the snacks joint espouse the Indian world view as an alternative to the western worldview. People of different races come to these places and derive strength from the cultural ethos propagated by these 'ethnic joints'. A close reading of these texts revealed how the immigrant subjectivity is strengthened through the act of consuming the culture. The cultural dilemma which is faced by immigrants is negotiated and resolved through food.

The relation of the central characters with America is very interesting. Tilo is always curious to know more about America but cannot because she is proscribed by the spices. Her relationship with Raven gives her the courage to break through these rules and reconstruct the world. She does not leave her Indian heritage but discards the stringent rules which impede her growth as an individual. Tilo accepts America as her home but does not leave her heritage behind and she renames herself 'Maya' which means 'illusion' – the concept which is deeply entrenched in Indian philosophy and metaphysical thought. Mrs. Gupta is different from other first generation immigrants, she does not feed any nostalgia or fantasies about India to her daughter Rakhi and yet she is Indian insofar as she upholds her art. Like Shukumar and Sanjeev in Lahiri's stories, Mr. Gupta is a man who cooks and as discussed in Chapter III, his cookery is not a break from tradition as he gets into his wife's shoes only after her death. Mr. Gupta who does not believe in magic or in the power of dreams, believes in the magnetic quality of his cookery. After his contribution to Kurma House, Rakhi regains her economic independence.

Of the three authors discussed in this study, Divakaruni is the only one who writes about racism in America. While *Jasmine* and *Wife* hint at racism, and Lahiri in *The Namesake* narrates how the word "gangrene" is painted on Gangulis' mail box; Divakaruni openly writes about the racial attacks on the characters. In *The Mistress of Spices*, Haroun and Mohan are victims of racial violence. In *Queen of Dreams*, Sonny, Jespal and Mr.Gupta are attacked brutally by chauvinist youth in the aftermath of the World Trade Centre attack. Divakaruni seems to show the real and magical side of America – where magic helps to alleviate the bitter truths of real life. Thus, the chapter hinted that Divakaruni presents a gradual journey of the immigrant subject towards a critical assimilation. It is clear from the foregoing analysis in the chapter that her characters do not blindly accept American culture or decry their indigenous heritage but uphold their origin. Furthermore, various orthodox Indian social strictures and taboos are questioned and discarded through the intervention of culinary images.

It has been contended that Divakaruni's upholding food and magic empowers the immigrant community. She capitalizes on the colonial imaginings of spice and magic and derives an entirely new meaning in the postcolonial scenario. Thus, food and magic imported from India renegotiates power in America. The scalding red chilli powder combats racial abuses, the auspicious yellow turmeric prevents the marriage from falling apart- thus the domestic battalion fights the battle outside the domestic sphere with the tools of the kitchen. She narrativizes about racism in America, and shows how an immigrant can subvert the commodification of her identity by celebrating it unhesitatingly. In her works, food co-opts the best of both the world and helps the immigrant subjects, especially women, in their rites of passage into America.

In this study the argument has been substantiated by citing instances from the text and giving critical insights. Though this study did not intend to draw parallels in the selected works, one has to evaluate the different ways in which the three authors employ these images to explore the subjectivities of the characters. The characters struggle to confront and work through the anguish and alienation that seems to tear them apart and food helps them map their journey to self realization. It needs to be reiterated that Bharati Mukherjee arrived in America as an immigrant a generation earlier than Divakaruni and Lahiri. She witnessed the phenomenon of the 'melting pot' and seemed to accept it, and so she depicts "arrival as gain" ("American Dreamer"). Her characters desire complete assimilation as is evident from the foregoing analysis and thus mirror their maker's perspective on Americanization. Divakaruni believes in solving the predicament of the cultural dilemma with a tilt towards her 'motherland'. With the help of magical realism and culinary images, she seems to suggest that grounding oneself in realities could always coexist with the magical lure of the motherland. She says, "We need to remain secure in our own identity but participate fully in the culture, politics and daily life of America. The important part of integration is that you don't give up, you share" (Girish). It is important to note that Divakaruni's characters seek friendship with other people belonging to the marginalia – Tilo is in love with Raven who is a Native American and she befriends Kwesi who is of African American origins. Similarly, people who frequent Kurma House belong to different ethnicities. Divakaruni suggests a consolidation of non-mainstream American populace in America for a political alignment. Lahiri suggests the path of straddling the two cultures, a middle path between total Americanization and Indianization. She narrativizes about people who want to assimilate, albeit, partially with the mainstream. Lahiri poignantly points out

that the ghettoization of a community help them preserve their identity in the purist sense, but impedes their assimilation in America's culture.

Culinary images serve as an intertextual trope in all the six selected texts. Lahiri and Divakaruni share their faith in the domestic domain while Mukherjee questions it. But all the three writers correlate identity with food and cookery. Mukherjee correlates food, body and decay to make a statement on immigrant subjectivity while Lahiri uses mundane narratives of food and Divakaruni intersperses food with magic. Thus with three different ways of employing culinary images, these writers elaborate on the diasporic Indian community settled in America.

Food is utilized by writers as an alternative mode of communication, it is symptomatic of the gap between the cultures, nevertheless, it was observed that its consumption fills this gap. It becomes a marker of the community and seems to empower it; food evokes and feeds on the nostalgia for the 'home'. It elicits opposing responses like attraction and repulsion. Further, accepting and rejecting food indicate a wide gamut of meaning in social semiotics. All the six texts are intertexual as they encompass different significations of food. America welcomes Jasmine through Dairy Queen and threatens Dimple through cheesecake. Dinners and lunches bring together Gogol and Moushumi, Moushumi and Dimitri, Jasmine and Bud, Shukumar and Shoba, Sanjeev and Twinkle, Belle and Jespal, Rakhi and Sonny. 'Proper' family meals consisting of Indian food perpetuates identity as is the case in the Ganguli family in *The Namesake*, Shoba and Shukumar in "The Temporary Matter", Lilia's family in "When Mr Pirzada came to dine" Rakhi's family in *Queen of Dreams*, Bengali luncheons in *Wife*. Alien food mores threaten

people as is the case of the Java's manager in *Queen of Dreams* and Miranda in "Sexy". Accepting food heralds friendships as observed in the relationship between Mr. Kapasi and Mrs. Das in "Interpreter of Maladies". At the same time rejecting food becomes symptomatic of hatred, disgust or suspicion, for instance, food prepared by Mrs. Sen is rejected by Eliot's mother, Mr. Kapasi flinches from asking Mrs. Das for water after knowing about her past aldulterous relationship, Mrs. Gupta refuses to touch the complimentary cookies by Java's manager. Gogol and Mrs.Sen are embarrassed at their 'otherness' while Mr. Gupta proudly markets it. The mundane aspect of food is portrayed when Mrs. Sen chops the vegetables with the Indian blade, and the magical aspect is foregrounded when Tilo cuts/grinds spices and the 'spice song' can be heard in the backdrop.

It is a noteworthy fact that the central characters of the six fictional works create themselves anew through their experiences as 'outsider – insider' in America. Most of the characters face challenges in assimilating into the American mainstream, albeit to varying extents. Tilo is not allowed to entertain non Indians in her shop although she wishes to help them, similarly Ashima restricts herself to the Bengali community, Rakhi cannot relate to American culture because of her obsession with India, Gogol wants to conceal his Bengali identity and pass over as mainstream, Dimple wants to become like the woman in the American television show, while Jasmine is proud of her Americanization. These characters brave the conflict of cultures and try to preserve or change their identities according to their desires. According to Vijay Mishra,

> Diasporic communities are always hyphenated and the race to occupy the space of the hyphen [...] signals the desire to enter some kind of generic

> taxonomy and yet at the same time, retain, through the hyphen, the problematic situating of the self simultaneously 'here' and 'there'. But as we have seen the 'belonging there' part of the equation cannot be linked to a teleology of return because the belonging can only function as an imaginary index that signifies its own impossibility. (432)

Drawing from Mishra's analogy between 'here' and 'there' we can deduce that Mukherjee prefers to be 'here' in America, almost negating her native culture. Divakaruni recognizes the need to hold on to her roots to gain power. Positive about her inherent culture, she chooses to be 'there' with Indians. Lahiri is more global in her approach, hence she could be construed as advocating the 'here and there' approach.

The difference in the selected writers' responses to immigration and assimilation may be rooted/routed in the fact that they arrived in America at different times and under different circumstances. Mukherjee and Divakaruni are first generation immigrants while Lahiri was born in England but brought up in America. Mukherjee immigrated to the United States much earlier than Divakaruni or Lahiri. She first arrived on the American shore when the melting pot metaphor still was used to describe the assimilation (at times coercively) of the heterogeneous populace of America into a unifying nationalistic whole. Mukherjee's experience in Canada, which upholds the 'multicultural mosaic', was traumatic where she alleged racial discrimination and later returned to America to become its permanent resident. Perhaps the unifying metaphor of melting pot was more comforting for Mukherjee because it minimized difference (at least theoretically) and strived to create a composite culture. She discarded the ethnic 'tags' presented to her by the critics and

proclaimed to be an American writer. Thus, Dimple and Jasmine both desire to assimilate seamlessly into the mainstream which is in turn reflected in their culinary endeavors. The violence and decay which accompany the immigrant experience arise out of the inevitable uprooting of the self from the past life and memories.

Divakaruni started writing in 1990s, when the rebellions of the 1960s had already yielded results in terms of the recognition of 'Asian American' voices (literary and political) in America. This implies, as Susan Koshy observes, that the canon of Asian American literatures has evolved according to the political dynamics between Asian countries and America (315-316). With the pressures of globalization and economic boom in the countries like China and India, the U.S. changed its attitude towards the immigrants from Asia. Divakaruni's inclination towards her land of origin may be construed as a disguised hope for the rise of India as an economic power and in a position to exercise more and more influence in the world affairs. The progress of India from a developing nation to a developed one would certainly have serious implications for a non resident Indian settled in America like herself. So, Divakaruni festoons symbols from her homeland and derives power from them in the American scenario. As she confesses, "No matter how long we live here [America] our Indian culture is what we know best, so it has a certain power over us which is almost mythical. India has this immense hold on our imagination" (Melwani). Both her works discussed in the study bear testimony to the fact that India indeed has a 'mythical' influence over Divakaruni's writings. She tries to present Indian reality and rationalism as an alternative to the established Eurocentric ones. Further, her Indian immigrant characters seek friendship mostly from people belonging to other ethnic groups rather than the mainstream Americans. Thus,

Divakaruni certainly has political overtones in her writings which are preoccupied with food and magic.

Lahiri is the only second generation immigrant discussed in this study, perhaps this could account for the fact that her loyalties do not incline towards India, her land of origin or towards America, the land in which she has grown up. Unlike Mukherjee, who consciously chose to inhabit America, Lahiri grew up in America as a Bengali. She juggled between identities and cultures like her character Gogol and accepts her dual heritage as a part of her life. Her writing is subtle and devoid of either violent excess or magical realism as she attempts to familiarize her community to the American populace without catering to the demand for the ethnographic details or exoticism. Can it be implied that Lahiri's middle path is also one of the most realistic responses to immigration and cultural conflict tearing the Indian diaspora apart? Can her highlighting the mundane aspect of the daily lives of immigrants be seen an attempt to incorporate the Bengali immigrants subjects into the mainstream? No doubt, the answers to these questions fall outside the scope of this study, but they certainly pave way for further investigations in this direction.

It was observed that the selected writers problematize the category of the culinary, prodding other writers to explore the realm of the kitchen further. Through culinary idioms, these works legitimize the right of the women to "cross and re-enter" (Lal) the sexual, literary, linguistic, mental, cultural, racial and national thresholds. In these novels the kitchen mores and food-lores are fictionalized. Food and spices are an alternative medium of communication which binds the entire human community. The domestic symbols of spices are endowed with universal significance. The poetics of food is shown to be potent enough to resolve the politics

of gender and race. These writers exploit their creativity by exploring the culinary idiom. Cookery no longer remains a mere craft, a trick, or a mundane practice of brewing and boiling the edible materials; these writers hail food and its signification raising it from a feminine task to a feminist text.

This study is perhaps the first to investigate the theme of identity in relation to culinary images in the six fictional works by Mukherjee, Divakaruni and Lahiri. The study of these images were informed by feminist and diasporic theories. However there can be many other approaches (including psychoanalysis) to analyze these images. The poetics of food in literature is filled with endless interpretative possibilities, and the interpretation presented in the study is just one of the possible findings. The study tried to fill the lacuna in the critical works on the culinary poetics in Indian Diasporic writings, and especially on the works by the selected three authors. It is hoped that first, the findings of the study would enrich the existing critical treatises on post-colonial women writers negotiating their identities through their writings. And secondly, this study would inspire more critical works analyzing the politics of food in the contemporary culture by theorizing on the poetics of food in fiction.

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The Mistress of Spices. Dir Paul Mayed Berges. Screenplay. Gurinder Chadha. Perf. Aishwarya Rai, Dylan McDermott and Anupam Kher. Entertainment Films, 2005.

The Namesake. Dir. Mira Nair. Screenplay Sooni Taraporewala. Perf. Tabu, Irfan Khan. Fox, 2007.

Mirch Masala. Dir. Ketan Mehta. Screenplay. Perf. Smita Patil. Channel Four,1985.