



A CULINARY JOURNEY THROUGH
CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI'S
NOVELS: A STUDY OF FOOD AND
IDENTITY



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Printed in India

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DEDICATION

TO THE ALMIGHTY AND MY MOTHER

PREFACE

Food is a fundamental aspect of human existence, shaping not only our physical experience but also our social and cultural identity. In Chitra Banerjee Divakurni's fiction, food and culture intersect in profound and dazzling ways, revealing deep truths about personal and collective identity, family and community, migration and immigration, and the complex interplay between tradition and modernity. This book explores the significance of food and culture in Divakurni's imaginative universe. Through close analysis of key scenes, characters, and themes, it will be showcased how Divakurni uses food to infuse her stories with sensory richness, emotional depth, and cultural complexity. The book will further examine how food functions as a site of memory and nostalgia, a marker of social status and gender roles, a medium of exchange and gift-giving, and a source of both conflict and reconciliation. By engaging with Divakurni's exploration of the meanings and practices associated with food and culture, this book offers readers a deeper understanding of the complex intersections of individual and collective identity formation within the South Asian diaspora. The author hopes that this study prompts further inquiry into the ways in which food shapes our cultural and social lives, and inspires readers to approach food not merely as a source of sustenance but as a rich source of meaning and connection.

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INTRODUCTION

Food is an integral part of Indian culture and has played a significant role in shaping the country's history and identity. Contemporary Indian Writing in English has explored the significance of the portrayal of food in representing Indian culture, reflecting the diversity of India's regional and culinary traditions. Indian culture is rich in diversity and has a wide range of cultural and culinary traditions. Indian cuisine varies from region to region, reflecting the country's multicultural and multi-ethnic identity. Indian food is characterized by its use of spices, herbs, and a variety of flavours, making it one of the most diverse and flavourful cuisines in the world. The significance of food in Indian culture can be seen in its religious and cultural practices. Food plays a significant role in Hindu, Muslim, Christian, and Sikh religious festivals, where it is used to symbolize the cultural and spiritual significance of the occasion. For example, during Diwali, the festival of lights celebrated by Hindus, special sweets and snacks are prepared to symbolize the triumph of good over evil. Contemporary Indian Writing in English has embraced food as a means of representation, reflecting the diversity of India's regional and culinary traditions. Contemporary Indian writers have used food as a literary tool to represent and explore Indian culture, identity, and society. These literary explorations have highlighted how food becomes a symbol of India's identity and serves as a means of cultural representation.

One such representation can be seen in the novel "The God of Small Things" by Arundhati Roy, where food is used to reflect the social hierarchy of Indian society. The novel portrays the distinct culinary traditions of the Syrian Christian community to which the principal characters belong. The novel highlights how the hierarchical structure of the Indian society is mirrored even in the way food is served, with different classes of people being served different types of food. Similarly, the short story "A Cup of Tea" by Katherine Mansfield explores the significance of food in Indian culture. The story portrays an Indian tea seller who serves tea to an upper-class British couple, while also highlighting his own poverty and hardship. The story raises questions about the exploitation of Indian labourers and the unequal social class system in India. Contemporary Indian Writing in English has embraced food as a representation of Indian culture, reflecting the diversity of India's regional and culinary traditions. Food has played a significant role in shaping Indian culture, society, and identity. Through literature, contemporary Indian writers have highlighted how food becomes a symbol of India's identity and serves as a means of cultural representation. Food has been an essential literary tool for contemporary Indian writers to express and represent Indian culture, identity, and society.

Food is a key aspect of diasporic communities' identity, serving as a connection to their culture and homeland. The Indian

diaspora is spread across the world, and food has been used as a bridge to connect them to their cultural roots. Contemporary Indian Writing in English has explored the role of food as a bridge for diaspora, highlighting its influence on diasporic identity and the immigrant experience. The term 'diaspora' refers to a community of people who have been displaced from their original homeland due to various political, social, and economic reasons. Diasporas create a sense of collective identity, holding onto their cultural roots and values. Food is an essential part of this diasporic identity, serving as a connection to their cultural heritage and homeland. In the case of the Indian diaspora, food has played a significant role in bringing the community together, reflecting their diverse cultural and culinary traditions. Indian cuisine has a wide range of flavours and dishes, reflecting the country's diverse regional and cultural identities. The diaspora uses food as a medium to connect with their roots and create a sense of belonging. Food has also been a means to adapt to the local cuisine of their adopted country while retaining their cultural identity.

Contemporary Indian Writing in English has explored the role of food as a bridge for diaspora, reflecting how food becomes a medium for communication between the diaspora and their cultural roots. These literary explorations have shed light on how the diaspora navigates their identity and assimilates into their adopted culture while retaining their cultural roots. One such representation

can be seen in the novel "The Namesake" by Jhumpa Lahiri, where food serves as a bridge between the diaspora and their cultural roots. The novel showcases how the central character, Gogol, navigates his cultural identity as a second-generation immigrant in America. Through food, Gogol connects with his cultural heritage, trying to replicate his mother's cooking to evoke the nostalgia of his childhood in India. Similarly, the short story "The Free Radio" by Salman Rushdie explores the role of food as a means for the diaspora to connect with their cultural roots. The protagonist, Ramani, moves to London and opens a fast food shop to make a living and connect with the Indian community. Through the food he serves, Ramani creates a sense of belonging for the diaspora, bridging the gap between their adopted country and cultural heritage. Contemporary Indian Writing in English has explored the role of food as a means for diaspora's identity formation, reflecting how food becomes a medium for communication between the diaspora and their cultural roots. Through literature, contemporary Indian writers have highlighted the complexity of diasporic identity formation and the role of food in creating a sense of connection between the diaspora and their cultural heritage. Food has become an essential literary tool for contemporary Indian writers to express and represent the diasporic experience of navigating their identity and assimilating into their adopted culture while retaining their cultural roots.

Food is an essential part of culture and identity, and it plays an important role in defining national identity. Indian cuisine is known for its rich variety of flavours and ingredients. Food is closely linked to the cultural and historical fabric of India, making it an integral part of the country's national identity. Contemporary Indian Writing in English has used food as a symbol to explore the intersection of food, culture, and national identity. India has a diverse and vibrant culinary tradition, with each region having its unique flavours and dishes. The country's rich culinary heritage is deeply embedded in its cultural and historical context. The use of particular ingredients and spices in Indian cuisine tells a story of trade, migration, and colonialism. Food in India serves as a marker of ethnic, religious, and cultural identities, reflecting the country's complex social fabric. Contemporary Indian Writing in English has used food as a symbol to explore and represent the complex nuances of Indian national identity. The use of food in literature has helped in creating a sense of nostalgia and an emotional connection with the country's unique culinary heritage. One such representation can be seen in the novel "The God of Small Things" by Arundhati Roy, where food is an essential element that reflects the social and cultural traditions of Kerala. The novel uses food to represent the identity of the region, where each dish and flavour is symbolic of the region's unique history, culture, and traditions. Similarly, in "The Gourmet" by Anita Desai, food is used as a symbol to explore the intersection of food, culture, and national identity. The protagonist is a gourmet

chef who uses her culinary expertise to explore the different flavours of India. Through her journey, the novel highlights the diversity of Indian cuisine, reflecting the country's complex social fabric. In the short story "How to make a good Indian curry" by Meera Syal, food is a symbol of diaspora and cultural hybridity. The story explores the process of assimilation and adaptation of Indian cuisine in the British society, reflecting the experience of the Indian diaspora in the UK. Contemporary Indian Writing in English has used food as a symbol to explore the intersection of food, culture, and national identity. Through the use of food in literature, contemporary Indian writers have explored the complexities of national identity, diaspora, and cultural hybridity, creating a sense of nostalgia and emotional connection with the country's rich culinary heritage. Hence, food as a symbol has become an essential literary tool for contemporary Indian writers to express and represent the country's unique national identity.

Food is not only a reflection of a country's culture and traditions but also a metaphor for the social and political realities of a society. Patriarchy, which is deeply embedded in Indian society, has influenced food practices, leading to the use of food in literary works to highlight and critique patriarchal norms. Contemporary Indian Writing in English has used food as a symbol to depict the gendered inequalities prevalent in Indian society. Food is an integral part of Indian culture and tradition, where it represents values such

as hospitality, unity and family bonding. However, food practices in India are also influenced by patriarchal norms, where cooking and serving food are seen as a woman's responsibility. It is believed that women should prepare the meals, serve them, and clean up afterward, which perpetuates gendered inequalities in the country. Contemporary Indian Writing in English has captured the gendered inequalities present in Indian society by using food as a symbol of patriarchal norms. The use of food in literature has helped in highlighting the oppression and exploitation that women face in a patriarchal society. One such representation can be seen in the novel "*The Mistress of Spices*" by Chitra Banerjee Divakurni. The protagonist, Tilo, is a skilled spice seller who uses her knowledge to help others. However, she lives in a society that is patriarchal, where women are expected to be submissive and only serve their husband and family. Tilo uses spices as a metaphor for patriarchal norms and values that hold women back from achieving their potential. Similarly, in Padma Lakshmi's memoir "*Love, Loss, and What We Ate*," the author describes how food served as a tool of control by her husband. The author's ex-husband would criticize and control her eating habits, which is a clear reflection of the patriarchal norms that govern Indian society. In the short story "*The Mark of Vishnu*" by Khushwant Singh, food is a symbol of male dominance in the household. The protagonist, a woman, is expected to prepare the food, serve it, and clean up afterward while being thrashed on her back by her husband. The use of food as a metaphor has helped in

highlighting the oppression that women face in a patriarchal society, where cooking and serving food serve as a tool to enforce gendered inequalities. Through the use of food in literature, contemporary Indian writers have explored the complexities of gendered inequalities and its impact on the social, cultural, and political fabric of Indian society. Hence, food as a symbol has become an essential literary tool for contemporary Indian writers to portray the patriarchal realities of India effectively.

Food is not only a significant aspect of Indian culture and religion but is also an integral part of the country's economy. Contemporary Indian Writing in English has explored the economic complexities of India by using food as a metaphor. The use of food metaphors in literature has helped in portraying the economic challenges and opportunities faced by the country. India's economy heavily relies on agriculture, with the sector being the primary source of employment for over half of the population. The country is also known for its diverse cuisines, with each region having its unique food culture. The food industry, including agriculture, processing, and hospitality, plays a crucial role in the country's economy. However, India's economic growth has been uneven, with challenges such as poverty, inequality, and unemployment. Contemporary Indian Writing in English has used food as a metaphor for portraying economic aspects of India. The use of such metaphors has helped in highlighting the economic challenges,

opportunities, and disparities in the country. In the novel "The White Tiger" by Aravind Adiga, food is used as a metaphor for the class divide in India's economy. The main character, Balram Halwai, is from a lower caste and begins working as a driver for a wealthy family. Balram describes how those from lower classes are "food for the rich" and how the wealthy exploit their poverty. A similar metaphor is used in the short story "Shiksha" by Neel Mukherjee, where food becomes a symbol for economic disparities in India. The main character, a domestic worker, observes the lavish lifestyle of her employers and their wastefulness with food while she struggles to provide for her children. In Shoba Narayan's essay "The Cows That Feed India," food serves as a metaphor for the agricultural sector's importance in the Indian economy. The essay highlights the significance of dairy farming in India, which is the largest milk-producing country globally. The author describes how cows are a "source of wealth" for the farmers, and their contribution to the economy is often overlooked. The use of food metaphors has helped in highlighting the economic challenges and disparities present in the country. Food has been used as a tool to depict the class divide, economic opportunities, and the importance of agriculture in the Indian economy. Through the use of food metaphors, contemporary Indian writers have explored the complexities of India's economy and its impact on the social, cultural, and economic fabric of the country. Hence, food as a metaphor has become an essential literary

tool for contemporary Indian writers to portray the economic realities of India effectively.

Religion and its rituals have played a significant role in Indian history, culture, and society. Contemporary Indian Writing in English has explored various aspects of religion in India, including the symbolism and metaphors associated with food. Food has been used as a powerful metaphor to portray the religious beliefs, practices, and traditions of India. Through the use of food metaphors, writers have depicted the complexity and diversity of Indian religion and its rituals. Religion and food are intricately linked in India. The country's diverse religions and cultures have given rise to a wide range of food practices and taboos. Food is used as an offering to the gods in Hinduism, while it is an integral part of the Christian and Muslim religious practices. Moreover, the preparation and consumption of food is also governed by religious beliefs and traditions. Contemporary Indian Writing in English has used food as a metaphor for portraying religious aspects of India. The use of food metaphors in literature has helped in highlighting the significance and symbolism of food practices in different religions. In his book, "Sacred Food," Devdutt Pattanaik explores the symbolic significance of food in Hindu mythology and religion. The book depicts food as a metaphor for the various Hindu deities and their roles in the universe. For instance, he describes the fabled Hindu god Vishnu as the "Supreme Chef" who prepares the world

through his "cosmic kitchen." Arundhati Roy's novel, "The God of Small Things," uses food as a metaphor to depict the rigid caste system in India. Food taboos and restrictions are shown as a metaphor for the social inequality and discrimination in India. The main characters, the twins Esthappen and Rahel, are forbidden from eating together due to their different castes. The novel highlights how food practices are used to enforce social hierarchies and oppress the lower castes. Another example of food being used as a metaphor for portraying religious aspects of India is seen in the short story, "Pakistani Food for the Soul" by Sabiha Al Khemir. The story uses food as a metaphor for the complexities of religious identities in India. The protagonist, a Muslim woman in a predominantly Hindu neighbourhood, starts to experience harmony and a sense of belonging through her love for Indian food. The story depicts food as a medium of cultural and religious harmony in a diverse India. The use of food metaphors has helped the writers to highlight the symbolism and significance of food practices in different religions. Food has been used as a tool to depict the complexities of religious identities and practices in India. Through the use of food metaphors, writers have been able to explore the significance of food practices in different religions and their impact on the social, cultural, and religious fabric of India. Hence, food as a metaphor has become an essential literary tool for contemporary Indian writers to portray the religious realities of India in a powerful and effective way.

Food has played a significant role in Indian history; it has been a source of livelihood, social identity, and cultural pride. Contemporary Indian Writing in English has explored the rich history of India and the role of food in it. Food has been used as a powerful metaphor to portray historical aspects of India, giving the readers deeper insights into the country's past. Food has been a crucial aspect of Indian culture and history. Different regions of India have unique culinary traditions and practices. The Indus Valley Civilization, one of the world's oldest civilizations, had a complex system of food production and consumption. The Mughal Empire introduced rich and flavourful food to India, while the British colonial rule brought in a more functional and utilitarian approach towards food production. Contemporary Indian Writing in English uses food as a metaphor to explore the country's rich and diverse history. The descriptions of food and culinary traditions are used as a medium to provide insights into the historical, cultural, and social implications of food practices. In the novel, "The Hungry Tide," Amitav Ghosh uses food as a metaphor for the cultural identity of the characters. The protagonist, Pia, is a non-Indian who develops a connection with the Indian culture through her love for food. Her journey of exploring the diverse culinary traditions of India is a metaphor for her journey of discovering her cultural identity. In his book, "The Taste of Words," Rumi Ahmed uses food as a metaphor for portraying the historical significance of different regions of India. The book is a collection of essays and recipes from various

regions of India, providing an insight into the historical importance of food practices. For instance, the author describes the use of spices in Indian cuisine as a metaphor for the country's long history of trade and commerce. Another example of food being used as a metaphor in contemporary Indian Writing in English can be seen in the short story, "Pigs Can't Swim" by Sanjukta Dasgupta. The story is set in a Bengali family where the protagonist, Uma, named after the Hindu goddess of fertility and motherhood, is forced to cook pork by her husband, who is a Christian. The story uses food as a metaphor for the clash between different cultural and religious identities in India. Through the use of food metaphors, writers have been able to highlight the cultural, social, and historical significance of food practices in India. Moreover, food has served as a tool for writers to reflect on the complex and diverse nature of Indian history. Hence, food as a metaphor has become an important literary tool for contemporary Indian writers to portray the historical realities of India in a powerful and effective way.

Food has been an integral part of Indian politics, especially during the freedom struggle and post-independence era. In contemporary Indian Writing in English, food has emerged as a powerful metaphor to portray the political aspects of India. Food and politics have been intertwined in Indian society for centuries. During the colonial era, the British colonial masters used to selectively provide food assistance to certain regions of India, while denying it

to others. This tactic created a sense of division and mistrust among the different regions of India. In the post-independence era, food has been used as a tool for political mobilization, especially during elections. Political parties often use food and food-related subsidies as a means to gain votes. Furthermore, the food security of marginalized sections of society has been a matter of political concern in India. Contemporary Indian Writing in English uses food as a metaphor to explore the political aspects of India in creative ways. The descriptions of food and culinary traditions are used to provide insights into the political and societal implications of food policies. Through the use of food metaphors, contemporary Indian writers have been able to highlight the injustices and inequalities that exist in Indian society. In *A Fine Balance*, Rohinton Mistry uses food as a metaphor for the political climate in India during the Emergency Era. The description of the scarcity of food during the Emergency Era serves as a powerful metaphor for the authoritarian rule and the political repression that existed during that period of time. Another example of food being used as a metaphor in contemporary Indian Writing in English can be seen in the novel, *The White Tiger* by Aravind Adiga. The food and consumption habits of the wealthy class serve as powerful metaphors for the systemic inequalities and exploitation that exist in India's political and economic systems. Through the use of food metaphors, writers have been able to highlight the complex and multifaceted nature of Indian politics. Moreover, food has served as a tool for writers to

reflect on the social and economic realities of India and the injustices and inequalities that exist in its political systems. Hence, food as a metaphor has become an important literary tool for contemporary Indian writers to portray the political realities of India in a powerful and effective way.

Food is not just a means of sustenance but also a metaphor for various social aspects of a community or society. In contemporary Indian Writing in English, food has emerged as a powerful metaphor to portray the social, economic and cultural aspects of India. Food is an essential part of the social fabric of Indian society. The preparation and sharing of food plays an important role in the hospitality, tribal traditions, caste structure, gender roles and power dynamics of the society. Food is used as a means of displaying wealth, status, taste, and cultural beliefs. The way food is prepared, presented and consumed reflects the customs, beliefs, and values of a community. Therefore, food can act as a powerful metaphor to capture the multi-faceted nature of social aspects of India. Contemporary Indian Writing in English uses food as a metaphor to explore the social aspects of India in creative ways. The descriptions of food and culinary traditions are used to provide insights into the deep socio-cultural connections between food, identity, and society. Through the use of food metaphors, contemporary Indian writers have been able to highlight the complexities of Indian society. In *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy uses food to highlight the

social hierarchies that exist in Indian society. The preparation and sharing of food act as a crucial metaphor for the power dynamics between different castes and classes in the society. The descriptions of the food prepared by Ammu, the main character, and her relationship with Velutha, a lower-caste carpenter, serve as powerful metaphors for the societal hierarchies and the restrictions imposed by the caste system. Another example of food being used as a metaphor in contemporary Indian Writing in English can be seen in the novel, *Mangoes in June* by Karnad. The title of the novel itself is a metaphor for the aspirations and realities of the middle class in India. The mangoes in June stand for the unattainable desires of the middle-class family, whose dreams of a better life are constantly thwarted by societal and economic constraints. Food, in this case, becomes a powerful metaphor for the social and economic realities of Indian middle-class families. Writers use food to capture the essence of different social, economic and cultural nuances of Indian society. Through the use of food metaphors, they are able to highlight the complexities and contradictions of Indian society. As such, food has emerged as an important tool for writers to reflect on the various social dimensions that form the fabric of Indian society.

Food is an important aspect of any ethnicity, reflecting the customs, traditions, and social identity of a community. In contemporary Indian Writing in English, food serves as a powerful tool to explore the ethnic roots of Indian communities. Food is an

essential expression of ethnic identity in Indian culture. Indian cuisine is rich and diverse, reflecting the various regions, castes, religions, and cultures that make up India. The use of local spices, cooking techniques, and ingredients, all contribute to the unique flavours and tastes of Indian cuisine. Through the lens of food, ethnic communities express their cultural identity, sharing their traditions and customs, carving out their place in Indian society. Contemporary Indian Writing in English uses food as a tool for exploring ethnic roots in creative ways. By describing food and culinary traditions, writers can provide insights into the deep cultural connections between food, identity, and ethnicity. In *The Namesake*, Jhumpa Lahiri uses food to explore the ethnic identity of her characters. Through the food served at family gatherings, celebrations, and everyday meals, Lahiri portrays the culinary traditions and cultural practices of the Bengali community. Her descriptions of food, such as 'luchi-aloor dom' (fried bread with spicy potato), 'rasgulla' (milk-based sweet), and 'pitha' (rice cake), all play important roles in highlighting the ethnic roots of her characters. Another example of how food is used to explore ethnic roots can be seen in the novel, *A Fine Balance*. Set in Mumbai, the novel portrays the social and economic struggles of various communities. Through the food and dietary habits of the characters, Mistry portrays their ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The descriptions of different kinds of cuisines, such as the Parsi's 'dhansak' (meat and lentil stew) and the Hindu's vegetarian dishes,

serve as a tool for exploring the ethnic roots of the different communities. Through food, writers can explore the deep cultural connections between identity, ethnicity, and cuisine. As such, food has become an important tool for capturing the nuances and subtleties of Indian society and culture, enabling readers to understand and appreciate the ethnic diversity that is such an integral part of the country's social identity.

Indian cuisine is diverse and rich in flavours and is one of the most significant aspects of Indian culture. It reflects the country's geographical, cultural, and religious diversity, and the role of food in everyday life is emphasized in contemporary Indian Writing in English. Food plays a significant role in Indian culture, where cooking and eating are not just basic necessities but also a form of expression, celebration, and communication. In India, food is closely linked to religion, festivals, and local customs and traditions. Regional cuisines showcase the different flavours, ingredients, and cooking techniques that reflect the country's cultural diversity. Food, in contemporary Indian Writing in English, offers a valuable tool to understand the complexity of cultural diversity within India. Food is an important aspect of the Indian identity, showcasing the country's rich cultural heritage. Contemporary Indian Writing in English employs food as a tool to explore the diversity of Indian culture. Through its various cuisines, food reflects the cultural, social, and economic identity of different communities in India. In *Sea of*

Poppies, Amitav Ghosh uses food to showcase the diversity of Indian cuisine, lifestyle, and social hierarchy among the characters. The novel captures the food habits, traditions, and practices of different communities, including the Bengali Hindus, the Anglo-Indians, the Muslims, and the lower caste, fused with the historical context of the British Raj. The descriptions of various local delicacies such as 'maacher jhol' (fish curry) and 'luchi' (fried bread) showcase the cultural diversity and vividness of Indian cuisine. Similarly, in *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy employs food as a tool to explore the cultural diversity of Kerala, India. The novel highlights the local cuisine and customs, such as the preparation of 'meen moilee' (fish curry), a popular dish in the region. The novel describes the uniqueness and complexity of the ingredients, a blend of coconut, chili, and tamarind, to capture the essence of Kerala's diverse culture. Food plays a significant role in shaping cultural diversity in India. In contemporary Indian Writing in English, food is employed as a tool to explore the cultural diversity of the country. It offers a medium to showcase the richness, diversity, and complexity of Indian cuisine while capturing the intricate connections between food and cultural identity. Through the lens of food, authors capture the history, geography, and social hierarchy of different communities in India. Overall, food highlights India's cultural diversity, which is an essential aspect of the country's identity.

Food is an integral part of Indian culture, and the significance of food in contemporary Indian Writing in English has become a popular theme for many Indian authors. In these works, food is used as a tool to explore and understand the cultural identity of the country. Food is an essential component of Indian culture and plays an important role in shaping the cultural identity of the country. Food in India is deeply rooted in tradition and history and is heavily influenced by religion, geography, climate, and socio-economic factors. The country's regional variations in cuisine demonstrate the cohesion and diversity of its cultural identity. In contemporary Indian Writing in English, food is used as a tool to explore the cultural identity of the country through its regional cuisines. Food is a symbol of the diversity and plurality of the country, representing different cultural values, customs, and traditions. Through food, authors depict the cultural and political history of the country and illustrate issues of identity and belonging. One such author who employs food as a tool to explore the Indian identity is Jhumpa Lahiri. In her works, Lahiri uses food as a tool to explore the cultural identity of the Indian immigrant community in the United States. *The Namesake* explores the food preferences of the protagonist, Gogol and his family, and how it reflects their cultural identity. In *The Namesake*, food is used as a tool to connect the protagonist, Gogol with his Bengali cultural heritage. The descriptions of Bengali cuisines such as Roshogulla, Mishti Doi, and the traditional Bengali fish curry not only evoke the taste of India but also evoke

the feelings of homesickness that Gogol experiences when he misses his family back home. In this way, Lahiri uses food to illustrate the complex relationship between food and cultural identity. Lahiri also employs food as a tool to demonstrate the socio-economic status of her characters. In *The Namesake*, Gogol's father, Ashoke, is a well-educated engineer who moves to the United States for better opportunities. However, following a frugal lifestyle, Ashoke prefers simple homemade Indian dishes over restaurant food. On the other hand, his mother, Ashima, who is a homemaker, enjoys exploring the American food scene. Lahiri uses food to illustrate the cultural differences between Ashoke and Ashima and how these differences shape their cultural identity. Food plays a significant role in shaping the Indian cultural identity. In contemporary Indian Writing in English, food is used as a tool to explore this cultural identity through descriptions of regional cuisines, family traditions, and cultural values. Jhumpa Lahiri's works illustrate how food is used as a means of exploring Indian identity, demonstrating food's significance in shaping cultural identity. Ultimately, food is instrumental in fostering a connection between readers and the richness of Indian culture and history, underscoring its significance as a tool for exploring the country's identity.

Food is not only an essential part of human existence but also a significant part of cultural traditions. In India, food is integral to the country's identity and heritage, representing diversity and

reflecting the country's customs and traditions. Contemporary Indian authors use food imagery for representing Indian cultural traditions, highlighting the country's cultural values, social customs and traditions. The use of food in contemporary Indian Writing in English opens up space for writers to explore and interpret the meaning of food. Authors use food as a metaphor through which they can portray social, cultural, and political issues in Indian society. One way that contemporary Indian authors emphasize the importance of food in Indian culture is by describing different food items and their significance. For example, in her book, *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy describes how special fish curries are cooked in Kerala for the traditional Onam festival. Such descriptions help readers to connect emotionally with India's rich cultural heritage. Another way that food is used in Contemporary Indian Writing in English is to highlight the diversity of regional cuisines. India is known for its diverse regional cuisines and contemporary Indian authors have used this diversity to showcase the cultural variations in India. For example, in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, the protagonist, Saleem, describes the spicy street food of Delhi and Mumbai as a reflection of the country's diverse culinary tradition. He contrasts this vibrant street food culture with the bland food in the cuisine of the former British colonizers. Food in fiction is also used to explore issues of identity in contemporary Indian Writing. In *The Namesake*, Jhumpa Lahiri shows how food is a symbol of the struggle for identity in the life of the Indian immigrant

Gogol Ganguli. Gogol is raised in a multicultural environment in the US, and although he is surrounded by American influences, he still feels a strong connection to his Indian roots. Lahiri uses descriptions of traditional Indian dishes to illustrate Gogol's relationship with India and his family. In addition, contemporary Indian Writing in English uses food as a means of expressing the values and beliefs of Indian culture. For instance, in Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*, the author uses descriptions of a humble meal shared by people from different faiths to illustrate the idea of unity in diversity. Through sharing food, people are able to connect with each other beyond their cultural barriers and religious affiliations. Food plays a critical role in representing Indian cultural traditions in contemporary Indian Writing in English. Using food in writing, authors are able to express the diverse cultural values, traditions, and customs of the country. Through food, they communicate the plurality of India's culture and demonstrate how different aspects of society are integrated. Overall, food acts as a cultural bridge that connects the reader to the richness of Indian culture and history. In addition, the use of food in contemporary Indian Writing in English demonstrates the significance of the relationship between food and cultural identity. Food contributes to shaping cultural identity and is an essential part of presenting India's cultural traditions. From showing regional cuisines to expressing the diverse cultural values, food is instrumental in helping readers understand and appreciate the country's rich cultural heritage.

Food is an integral part of Indian culture, and it plays an important role in contemporary Indian Writing in English. Food as a subject in literature enables the writers to connect with their readers on a personal level by illuminating cultural values and traditions. Contemporary Indian writers use food as a tool to explore and express the Indian identity, cultural diversity, and ethnic roots of the country. In contemporary Indian literature, food serves as a metaphor through which authors portray social, cultural, and political aspects of Indian society. For instance, Jhumpa Lahiri's Pulitzer-Prize-winning novel, *The Interpreter of Maladies*, showcases the significance of food as a means of cultural integration. The story revolves around a Bengali-American family who invites their expatriate Indian neighbour for dinner to encourage their sons to learn about their cultural heritage. During the meal, the diverse characters exchange various food traditions, allowing them to connect and understand each other's cultures. Similarly, *The God of Small Things*, uses food to explore gender politics in India. Roy uses food to explore the prevalence of gender-based discrimination in Indian society. For example, Ammu, the main character in the book, is criticized for daring to eat an egg while pregnant, which is believed to be bad for her unborn baby. This highlights how food in Indian culture adheres to patriarchal norms and how it is used to restrict and control women. Food also plays an essential role in expressing Indian identity in contemporary literature. Ruchir Sharma's nonfiction book, *Breakout Nations*,

describes India's ambition to be recognized as a superpower, and the author highlights Indian cuisine as a symbol of its national identity. The author argues that India's diverse food culture is a reflection of its cultural heritage and strength. Moreover, food is also a means of expressing the plurality of Indian culture. Indian cuisine is a mixture of various regional cuisines, and in contemporary Indian literature, it is used to showcase the cultural diversity of India. For example, in Chitra Banerjee Divakurni's *The Mistress of Spices*, the central character, Tilo, an Indian immigrant living in the United States uses food to connect with the diaspora population. Tilo uses the spices that are typical of various regions of India to cook meals for her clients, allowing her to connect with the diverse cultural identities of her clients. Food serves as a metaphor that reveals cultural values, social and political aspects of society and offers an insight into the country's ethnic roots. It is evident that food is used as an essential tool in contemporary Indian literature to portray the cultural diversity, social, and structural issues of the country. Through food, contemporary Indian writers are fostering an understanding of the plurality of Indian culture within and beyond India.

CHAPTER- 1

BREAKING BREAD, BUILDING BRIDGES: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FOOD IN DIVAKURNI'S FICTION

Chitra Banerjee Divakurni is a renowned Indian-American author who is known for her works that explore the experiences of the Indian diaspora and their relationship with their culture, traditions and homeland. Food is a recurring motif in her works, and it plays a significant role in portraying the essence of Indian culture. Food is an essential part of the Indian culture and traditions. In Divakurni's works, the portrayal of food represents the rich heritage of Indian cuisine and the cultural practices that are associated with it. For instance, in her novel 'The Palace of Illusions', the protagonist, Draupadi is shown cooking a variety of traditional Indian food, which is symbolic of her connection to her roots and cultural identity. The way Divakurni describes the preparation of food, and the significance of particular ingredients, is a reflection of the richness of Indian cuisine. India is a country that is known for its diversity. The portrayal of food in Divakurni's works represents the regional and cultural diversity of India. The different types of food, preparation methods, and ingredients used are symbolic of the uniqueness of each region in India. In 'Arranged Marriage', one of her first books, the protagonist's memories of the different types of

food prepared by her mother-in-law in India, vividly describe the regional variations found in Indian cuisine. The portrayal of food as a reflection of the regional diversity of India is a hallmark of Divakurni's writings.

In India, food is an integral part of social and cultural occasions. Divakurni uses food as a symbol to highlight the social significance of food in Indian culture. In *'The Mistress of Spices'*, the protagonist Tilo's knowledge of spices is a reflection of her wisdom and her role as a mediator in people's lives. In *'One Amazing Thing'*, the different food preferences of the characters are used to reflect their social and cultural backgrounds, and the social gatherings that occur in her novels are invariably accompanied by the description of food. The portrayal of food as a social and cultural element in Divakurni's works is evidence of the importance of food in Indian society. The portrayal of food in Divakurni's works provides a sense of belonging to the Indian diaspora. In *'Before We Visit the Goddess'*, the protagonist's memories of the Bengal sweets that her mother used to prepare reflect her sense of connection to her cultural identity and roots. Similarly, in *'Mistress of Spices,'* the spices that Tilo uses to prepare food are described as a way to connect the diaspora with their homeland. The portrayal of food as a way to connect and provide a sense of belonging to the Indian diaspora is evident in Divakurni's writing. Her portrayal of food in her works is symbolic of the diverse and unique cultural traditions that India has to offer.

It provides a sense of belonging and connects the diaspora to their cultural roots. With her expert use of food in her writings, Divakurni showcases the richness of Indian cuisine and its role in Indian culture. Her works provide valuable insights into the importance of food and cultural practices in the representation of Indian culture.

Through her works, Chitra Banerjee Divakurni explores the experiences of the Indian diaspora and their relationships to food. Divakurni uses food as a symbol of connection and nostalgia, representing a bridge between the diaspora and their homeland. Her use of food symbolizes the significance of cultural practices and traditions in the Indian diaspora. In "*The Mistress of Spices*," Divakurni highlights the protagonist Tilo's knowledge of spices, which connects her with her homeland and the Indian community. Food serves as a symbol of culture, which can be shared with others, even outside the country. Similarly, in "*Before We Visit the Goddess*," the protagonist Sabitri and her daughter-in-law Bela bond over cooking traditional Bengali sweets. The act of cooking and sharing represents a connection with their Bengali heritage and the larger Indian diaspora. The food symbolizes shared experiences with their homeland, creating a bridge of cultural connection between generations of the diaspora.

Divakurni's use of food also represents a bridge between diaspora and their memories of home. In "*Arranged Marriage*," the protagonist's memories of her mother's cooking and the taste of

home comfort and ground her, even in a foreign land. The protagonist's memories of her mother's cooking evoke a sense of nostalgia and a longing for home. Moreover, in "*The Mistress of Spices*," Tilo uses spices to conjure memories of her childhood in India, bringing her closer to her homeland. By using food to evoke memories and nostalgia, Divakurni highlights how food can be a bridge between the diaspora's present and their past. She also highlights how it can be a source of identity and belonging for the diaspora. In "*One Amazing Thing*," the diverse food preferences of the nine characters reflect their cultural backgrounds and identities. The food symbolizes their unique experiences and stories, creating a bridge of understanding between them. Moreover, in "*Before We Visit the Goddess*," the protagonist Sabitri's Bengali sweets demonstrate her connection to her identity and heritage. Through the food, Sabitri feels a sense of belonging to a larger community that shares her cultural practices and traditions. Divakurni highlights how food can provide a sense of identity and foster a sense of belonging, helping the diaspora to come to terms with their identities in a foreign land. Food serves as a symbol of culture, memory, and identity, providing a framework for shared experiences and connections between generations. By exploring the significance of food in the diaspora, Divakurni offers a way to appreciate and celebrate their heritage and traditions, bridging the gap with their past and creating a sense of belonging.

Divakurni's writings often explore the role of food in shaping and reinforcing national identity in India. Through her works, Divakurni uses food as a symbolic representation of India's diverse and complex culture. Her works highlight the diversity of Indian cuisine as an essential component of national identity. In "*The Mistress of Spices*," the protagonist Tilo hails from Kerala, an area famous for its spice trade. Through Tilo's knowledge of spices, Divakurni celebrates the diversity and nuances of Indian cuisine. This diversity is further explored in "*One Amazing Thing*," where the diverse food preferences of the nine characters are used to highlight their cultural backgrounds and identities. Divakurni's use of food as a symbol also draws attention to regional and historical contexts as essential in shaping national identity. In "*The Palace of Illusions*," for example, the cuisine of the different regions of India is highlighted, representing the diversity of culture within the nation. The varying flavours and ingredients of these cuisines come to symbolize their respective regions, reflecting the rich and complex nature of Indian society.

Furthermore, in "*Before We Visit the Goddess*," the preparation of traditional Bengali sweets ties together the family's identity, honouring their shared Bengali heritage. Food serves as a cultural marker as the characters maintain their identity and connection with their regional and historical roots. Divakurni's use of food as a symbol also demonstrates how shared culinary traditions can foster

a sense of national identity. In "Arranged Marriage," the protagonist's relationship with her mother-in-law is explored through food. Despite cultural differences, the shared experience of cooking and sharing food creates a relationship between the two characters that bridges their divide. This shared culinary experience serves as an example of how food can bring people together and encourage a sense of shared identity and exchange. Divakurni also utilizes food as a symbol of national pride and patriotism. In "Queen of Dreams," the protagonist Binapani speaks of the power of Indian thali, a traditional meal served in a round platter. She celebrates its richness, diversity, and the pride it instils in her. Food becomes a symbol of national pride and a way to connect with India's cultural and historical heritage. Divakurni's works demonstrate the significance of food as a symbol in shaping and reinforcing India's complex national identity. Food is portrayed as an essential part of India's diverse and rich heritage, drawing attention to regional and historical contexts that shaped and continue to shape Indian society. Through its power to bring people together and foster a sense of shared identity and pride, food is an instrumental tool in the construction and representation of national identity in Divakurni's works.

One way that Divakurni uses food as a metaphor for patriarchal norms is by utilizing it as a symbol of the control of women's bodies. In "The Palace of Illusions," for example, Draupadi must adhere to

strict dietary restrictions imposed by her husband's family. Her body and its needs are subjugated to the will of her family and society, as a reflection of patriarchal norms in Indian society. Similarly, in "*The Mistress of Spices*," food is used to control the protagonist Tilo's body and prevent her from expressing her true desires. Tilo, who is a magical spice vendor, must refrain from tasting the spices she sells. This prohibition reflects wider societal expectations that women must restrain their desires and limit themselves to prescribed roles. Divakurni also employs food as a metaphor to depict the class-based distinctions in Indian society and the way they reinforce patriarchal norms. In "*Arranged Marriage*," the protagonist is discriminated against by her in-laws, who perceive her cooking as low-class and not up to their standards. The focus on the quality of the food reflects the caste-based discrimination within the society and its impact on women. Similarly, in "*Oleander Girl*," the patriarchal norms of elitism and classism in India are highlighted through the protagonist Korobi's kitchen-related experiences. Her aunt considers the food served in the kitchen as beneath her, while her grandmother does not allow her to enter the kitchen since the patriarchal notion of virginity is associated with the space.

In Divakurni's works, food is also used as a metaphor to represent the reinforcement of gender roles in Indian society. In "*The Palace of Illusions*," Draupadi is expected to cook for and serve her husbands' family, despite her royal status. Gender expectations

are enforced even within the royal household, where Draupadi is constrained in her role and expected to serve the men. Similarly, in "*Before We Visit the Goddess*," the protagonist Sabitri's daughter Bela is judged by her husband on the basis of her cooking skills. This constitutes subjugation of women as their worth is perceived by the quality of their cooking, rather than their individual merit. Divakurni's works provide a window into the patriarchal norms that have permeated Indian society. Through her use of food as a symbol for societal expectations, she draws attention to the control of women's bodies, class-based distinctions, and the reinforcement of gender roles that are prevalent in Indian society. Food becomes a powerful tool for critical social commentary in Divakurni's works, offering insights into the complex interplay of gender and power in Indian culture.

Food plays a significant role in the Indian economy, and Divakurni makes skillful use of this to provide insights into the complex economic realities of the country. One way in which Divakurni uses food as a metaphor to depict the economic conditions of India is by highlighting the disparities that exist between different socio-economic groups. In "*The Palace of Illusions*," for example, the protagonist Draupadi reflects on the fact that while the wealthy and powerful have access to lavish feasts, many others in the kingdom are starving and struggling to feed themselves. Through this reflection, Divakurni uses food as a

metaphor to convey the economic inequities that exist in Indian society. Similarly, in "Arranged Marriage," Divakurni portrays the struggles of a young bride who moves from India to the US and tries to adjust to life there. Throughout the story, food serves as a metaphor for the bride's economic condition; she reflects on the differences between the elaborate feasts of her childhood and the meager meals she must now prepare for herself. Divakurni uses food in this instance as a symbol of the challenges faced by those who must navigate the economic realities of life in a new country.

Divakurni also uses food as a metaphor to portray India's rapid economic growth and development in recent decades. In "The Mistress of Spices," for instance, the protagonist Tilo, who runs a spice shop in Oakland, California, reflects on the changing tastes of her customers and their growing interest in Indian cuisine. Through Tilo's experiences, Divakurni highlights the increasing global recognition of Indian food and its growing role in the global economy. Similarly, in "Oleander Girl," Divakurni portrays the impact of India's economic transformation on the country's middle class. The protagonist Korobi, a young woman from a privileged background, reflects on the changing economic realities of her country and the opportunities and challenges these bring. Through Korobi's experiences, Divakurni uses food as a metaphor to symbolize the dynamism of India's economy and its potential for growth and development. Finally, Divakurni uses food as a

metaphor to portray the struggle for economic independence in India. In "*Before We Visit the Goddess*," for instance, the protagonist Sabitri reflects on her struggle to make a living as a young woman in India, eventually finding success as a bakery owner in the US. Through Sabitri's experiences, Divakurni portrays the struggle of Indian women to achieve economic autonomy and independence, using food as a symbol of their resilience and determination. Her portrayal of food as a symbol of economic inequities, development, and independence adds depth to her portrayal of Indian culture and society. Overall, food as a metaphor allows Divakurni to highlight the complexities and nuances of economic life in India.

Food plays a significant role in Indian religions, and Divakurni uses this to her advantage to portray the complexities of religious practices and beliefs. Her use of food as a metaphor in her works enables readers to gain insight into the religious and spiritual practices of India. Divakurni often uses food as a metaphor to portray the religious rituals and practices of India. In her novel, "*The Palace of Illusions*," the protagonist Draupadi prepares food as an offering to the gods, emphasizing the importance of food in religious ceremonies. The food, in this sense, serves as a symbol of devotion and piety. Similarly, in "*Sister of My Heart*," the protagonist Anju observes the Hindu festival of Navratri, during which she fasts and prepares an offering of food for the goddess Durga. Through Anju's experience, Divakurni highlights the importance of fasting and food

offerings in Hindu rituals. The food, in this sense, serves as a metaphor for devotion and spiritual practice. Divakurni also uses food as a metaphor to depict the religious diversity of India. In "*The Mistress of Spices*," the protagonist Tilo, who is a Hindu, encounters people from different religious backgrounds who come to her spice shop seeking solutions to their problems. Tilo's ability to understand the different religious practices and beliefs of her customers portrays the religious diversity of India. Similarly, in "*Oleander Girl*," the protagonist Korobi observes various religious customs, including the Buddhist custom of offering food to the monks. Through Korobi's experiences, Divakurni highlights the plurality of religious beliefs and practices in India. Food, in this sense, serves as a metaphor for religious diversity and tolerance.

In her works, Divakurni uses food as a metaphor to depict the religious symbolism in Indian culture. In "*Before We Visit the Goddess*," the protagonist's mother, who follows Hindu traditions, prepares food that symbolizes her love for her daughter. The food, in this sense, serves as a metaphor for the emotional and spiritual bond between mother and daughter. Similarly, in "*Queen of Dreams*," the protagonist's mother, who is a political activist, prepares food that symbolizes her political beliefs. The food, in this sense, serves as a metaphor for the ideology that the protagonist's mother wants to propagate. Divakurni's use of food as a metaphor enables readers to gain insight into the religious and spiritual

practices of India, depicting religious rituals, diversity, and symbolism. Her portrayal of food as a symbol of religious devotion, diversity, and symbolism adds depth to her portrayal of Indian culture and spirituality. Overall, food as a metaphor allows Divakurni to highlight the intricacies and nuances of religious beliefs and practices in India.

Food is a recurring motif in her works and serves as a means to explore the historical, cultural, and societal aspects of India. Divakurni's use of food as a metaphor enables readers to gain an insight into the evolution of Indian cuisine, the impact of colonization, and the prevailing social and cultural influences. Divakurni often uses food to portray the rich cultural history of India in her writing. In her novel, "The Palace of Illusions," the protagonist Draupadi reminisces about her childhood and the traditional Indian sweetmeats that her mother used to make. Divakurni's portrayal of these sweet delicacies as a symbol of Indian cultural heritage highlights the centrality of food in Indian culture. Similarly, in "Sister of My Heart," the protagonist Anju prepares traditional Indian dishes for her family, thereby emphasizing the significance of preserving and celebrating one's cultural heritage. Through the use of food as a metaphor for Indian heritage, Divakurni illustrates the importance of cultural identity and its preservation. She uses food as a metaphor to highlight the impact of colonization on Indian cuisine and culture. In "Queen of Dreams,"

the protagonist's mother, who is a political activist, recounts how British colonization had a profound impact on India's food culture. The British introduced new crops and spices to India, leading to the emergence of fusion cuisine. Divakurni's representation of food as a symbol of colonialism's impact on Indian cuisine serves to highlight the loss of traditional food culture and its replacement with the hybrid food culture. Similarly, in "*The Mistress of Spices*," the protagonist Tilo serves as a witness to the cultural assimilation that occurred during the time of colonization. Tilo's mastery of traditional Indian spices and cooking techniques is a metaphor for the preservation of India's culinary heritage in the face of colonization. Through the use of food as a metaphor, Divakurni portrays the power dynamics and cultural impact of colonization on India's food culture.

Food is often used as a metaphor to portray the social and political dynamics of Indian society. In "*Before We Visit the Goddess*," food serves as a symbol of social status and economic difference between the rich and the poor. The wealthy characters in the novel indulge in expensive and extravagant meals, while the poor are portrayed as struggling to make ends meet. Through the use of food as a metaphor, Divakurni highlights the socio-economic inequality in Indian society. Similarly, in "*Oleander Girl*," food serves as a symbol of the social tension between different castes in Indian society. The custom of cooking and eating food in separate

vessels based on caste hierarchy is used as a metaphor for the deep-seated social tensions in Indian society. Divakurni's use of food as a metaphor adds depth and richness to her portrayal of Indian history, culture, and society. Through food, she explores the complexity and diversity of Indian society and its evolving culture. Divakurni's representation of food as a symbol of Indian heritage, the impact of colonization, and social and political dynamics offers readers an insight into the historical, cultural, and societal aspects of India. Overall, food as a metaphor enables Divakurni to highlight India's multiculturalism, complex history, and culinary diversity.

One of the recurring themes in Divakurni's work is the portrayal of political oppression in India. She highlights this oppression through the use of food in her stories. In "Queen of Dreams," food serves as a metaphor for the Indian government's control of its citizens. The protagonist's mother, who is a political activist, tells stories of how the government has taken control of the food supply, leading to widespread hunger and malnutrition. Through food, Divakurni portrays the consequences of political oppression and the impact on the economy and society. Similarly, in "*Before We Visit the Goddess*," food represents the power dynamic between the wealthy and the poor. The wealthy are able to afford lavish, decadent meals while the poor are forced to subsist on cheap, unhealthy food. Through this contrast, Divakurni highlights the economic inequality in India and its impact on the food industry.

Divakurni also uses food as a metaphor to highlight cultural resistance in India. For example, in "*The Mistress of Spices*," food is a symbol of resistance against cultural assimilation and erasure. The protagonist, Tilo, is an immigrant, and through her expertise in cooking and food, she preserves her Indian cultural identity and resists assimilation into mainstream American culture. Similarly, in "*Oleander Girl*," food represents the cultural identity of the protagonist, Korobi. Through her expertise in cooking and her adherence to traditional cooking techniques, Korobi demonstrates her pride in her Indian culture and resists assimilation into Western culture.

In many of her stories, Divakurni uses food to highlight the legacy of colonialism in India, as well as its impact on the country's food culture. In "*Arranged Marriage*," food serves as a metaphor for colonialism's impact on traditional Indian cuisine. The protagonist observes how Indian cuisine has been influenced by British cuisine and how this has resulted in the loss of traditional Indian cooking techniques. Through this, Divakurni highlights the impact of colonialism on India's cultural heritage and the struggle to preserve traditional culture. Similarly, in "*One Amazing Thing*," food represents the intersections of different cultures and the legacy of colonization. The diverse group of characters in the story shares stories of their cultural heritage through the food they prepare and eat, highlighting the complex legacy of colonization and the ways in

which food culture reflects this legacy. Through her use of food metaphorically, Divakurni highlights various political aspects of India. Her storytelling offers readers an insight into India's cultural heritage, political oppression, and the legacy of colonization. Food portrays the economic inequality, cultural resistance, and political oppression prevalent in Indian society, thus grounding the stories in a deeper understanding of the country and its people. Overall, food as a metaphor offers a unique and insightful perspective into Indian politics and history.

Through her writing, Divakurni utilizes food to highlight issues such as social inequality, cultural traditions, and gender roles. One of the recurring themes in Divakurni's work is the portrayal of social inequality in India. She highlights this inequality through the use of food in her stories. In "The Palace of Illusions," food serves as a metaphor for social status and power. Draupadi, a princess, and later the queen, is always surrounded by lavish feasts, symbolizing her high social status and highlighting the contrasts between the rich and poor. Similarly, in "Oleander Girl," food represents the socio-economic divide in India. Korobi, the protagonist, lives in a comfortable, upper-class household and enjoys elaborate meals, while her maid, Sudha, who is from a lower socio-economic background, eats simple food. Through their food habits, Divakurni highlights the economic disparities in India. Divakurni also uses food as a metaphor to highlight traditional cultural practices in India.

For example, in "Arranged Marriage," food serves as a symbol of cultural traditions. The protagonist attends traditional Indian weddings, where food is an essential part of the celebrations. In sharing the food with the wedding guests, Divakurni portrays the importance of communal celebration in Indian culture. Similarly, in "One Amazing Thing," food symbolizes cultural practices, with the diverse group of characters in the story sharing their cultural heritage through the food they prepare and eat.

In many of her stories, Divakurni uses food to highlight gender roles prevalent in Indian society. In "*The Mistress of Spices*," food is a symbol of female power and autonomy. The protagonist, Tilo, is a spice seller who uses her knowledge of spices to heal and help her customers. Through her expertise in cooking and food, Tilo subverts traditional gender roles, taking on a leadership role in her community. Similarly, in "Sister of My Heart," food serves as a symbol of women's domestic responsibilities. Sudha and Anju, the two main characters in the story, bond over cooking and preparing food, emphasizing the traditional role of women in Indian society as homemakers. Through her use of food metaphorically, Divakurni highlights various social aspects of India. Her storytelling offers readers an insight into India's cultural heritage, social inequalities, and gender roles. Food portrays the cultural traditions, social class differences, and traditional gender roles prevalent in Indian society, thus grounding the stories in a deeper understanding of the country

and its people. Overall, food as a metaphor offers a unique and insightful perspective into Indian culture and society.

Food is an essential part of any culture. People's eating habits and the foods they consume often reflect their cultural background and traditions or ethnic roots. The food a group or individual consumes holds significance in understanding their ethnic identity and their social practices and customs. Thus, food is a representation of how people from different regions and ethnic groups relate to one another. Divakurni explores the role of food in understanding ethnic roots in various ways. She emphasizes how food brings people closer to understanding their ethnic roots while also fostering a sense of community and belonging. In "*The Mistress of Spices*," food plays a significant role in the protagonist's life. Tilo, a spice seller, uses her spices to evoke memories of home and the traditions she left behind. Tilo's customers, mostly immigrants like herself, seek out the spices from their native countries to experience the comfort of their home culture and recapture feelings of belonging. Similarly, in "*Sister of My Heart*," food serves as a cultural connection between the two cousins, Sudha and Anju, as they cook together and bond over traditional meals. Through food, the cousins express their cultural heritage and shared experiences that are integral to their relationship. In "*Before We Visit the Goddess*," food is used as a symbol of connection between the protagonist, Sabitri, and her daughter, Bela. Sabitri sends recipes to her estranged daughter,

hoping that the shared experience of cooking and eating the same food will foster a sense of togetherness. Food plays a vital role in Divakurni's fiction for exploring ethnic roots. It highlights the significance of maintaining cultural traditions and practices and the role of food in maintaining these practices. Food helps characters understand their roots as they seek comfort in the familiar tastes and dishes of their culture. Through this use of food, Divakurni portrays how sharing food and cultural practices create a sense of belonging and unity in multicultural societies, emphasizing the importance of embracing and celebrating diverse cultures.

Divakurni's work portrays the social, cultural, and emotional significance of food in Indian culture and how it is used to represent cultural diversity. Food plays a critical role in cultural diversity, as it holds the capacity to reflect cultural values, beliefs, and traditions. The food that a community consumes is a representation of their cultural heritage and reflects their geographical location, history, and social and economic circumstances. It is a representation of their identity and helps them distinguish themselves from others. Therefore, food is an essential element in understanding cultural diversity and exploring it through literature. Divakurni's storytelling has a distinctive emphasis on food and its role in exploring Indian-American communities' cultural diversity. Her work is a unique blend of settings, characters, and events that highlight food's significance and its usage to represent cultural diversity. The

recurring symbol of food in Divakurni's work not only serves to depict Indian cuisine's complexities but also nurtures the diversity of the Indian diaspora community. In her novel "*The Mistress of Spices*," food plays a significant role in portraying the cultural diversity of Indian-American communities. The protagonist, Tilo's unique ability to blend different spices to create specific emotions reflects her desire to connect with others from diverse cultural backgrounds. The novel highlights how food can bring different cultural experiences together through its diverse aromas, colours, and flavours. Similarly, in "*Sister of My Heart*," Divakurni uses food as a device to represent the bond between two cousins, Sudha and Anju. The cousins bond over cooking traditional meals and sharing recipes, reflecting their strong connection to their cultural heritage. Through food, Divakurni highlights how cultural diversity is maintained within families, and how food can serve as a source of unity and belonging. In her novel "*One Amazing Thing*," Divakurni explores diverse cultural experiences and perspectives through the lens of food. The novel is about a group of strangers trapped in a consulate during a disaster. The various characters come from different cultural backgrounds, but they all share a love of food. The story arcs and character development of the characters are interconnected through food, showcasing how cultural heritage is intrinsic to human connection. Food represents the cultural identity, history, and traditions of various communities and reflects their distinctiveness. Through her works, Divakurni highlights how food

plays a critical role in the maintenance of cultural diversity within immigrant communities and brings diverse experiences together. By using food to explore cultural diversity in her writing, Divakurni showcases the integral role of food in the Indian-American community, further perpetuating the importance of embracing and respecting cultural diversity.

Divakurni has gained worldwide recognition for her imaginative fiction works, which focus on the experiences of Indian immigrants trying to assimilate into Western cultures. She uses various themes, symbols, and motifs to convey her message, but food stands out as one of the prevalent symbols in many of her works. Food is an essential aspect of Indian culture, and it reflects the values, traditions, and identity of the people. Divakurni uses food as a metaphor to explore the Indian identity in her various works. Food is a significant aspect of Indian identity, and it represents much more than just a source of nutrition. It is considered the cornerstone of Indian culture, and it conveys various social, cultural, and emotional meanings. In Indian culture, food plays an essential role in sharing one's emotions, hospitality, and expressing one's love and affection. Moreover, Indian food is diverse, and it varies from region to region, reflecting the diversity and complexity of Indian culture. Therefore, Food is deeply intertwined with Indian identity, and it forms a significant aspect of the Indian immigrant experience. Divakurni's fiction uses food as a recurring motif to explore the Indian

immigrant experience and Indian identity. In her novel, "*The Mistress of Spices*," the protagonist, Tilo, is a mystical woman with the power to heal people through her spices. Tilo's ability to heal through spices represents the healing powers of food in Indian culture. Additionally, food is used to represent the Indian immigrant experience and the struggle to maintain cultural identity in a foreign land. Tilo's relationship with spices represents the tension between Indian and American cultures' conflicting values and identities. Another notable work by Divakurni that uses food to explore Indian identity is the novel "*Sister of My Heart*." The novel is about two cousins, Sudha and Anju, who grow up together in Calcutta but later go their separate ways. Cooking and food are significant symbols in the novel because they represent the social, cultural, and emotional connections between the two cousins. Food is used to represent their bond, memories, and cultural identity. For instance, the cousins bond over cooking traditional meals like biryani and fish curry, which connects them to their cultural heritage. Divakurni's novel, "*One Amazing Thing*," also explores the use of food in representing Indian identity. The novel is about a group of strangers trapped in a consulate during a disaster. The characters in the novel come from different cultural backgrounds, but food helps them connect and understand each other. The novel uses food to explore how food and cooking represent different cultural identities, cultural conflict, and how food can bring people together from different cultures. Food is a crucial aspect of Indian identity, and it represents cultural values,

traditions, and social connections. Divakurni uses food to represent the Indian immigrant experience, cultural identity, and the tension between conflicting cultural values. Furthermore, food plays an essential role in connecting people from different cultural backgrounds, and it is used to explore how food can bring people together. Through her work, Divakurni highlights how food can be used to represent, maintain, and strengthen Indian identity and culture in diaspora communities.

Indian culture is rich in values that signify the importance of family, love, hospitality, and tradition. Food plays a significant role in Indian culture for expressing these values. In Divakurni's works, food represents Indian cultural traditions, and its significance is explored in detail. In Indian culture, food is considered a sacred act, and the sharing of food signifies the value of proximity and unity. Food precedes hospitality, and cooking and sharing food are considered essential ways of expressing love and affection towards guests. Food is also one of the primary ways in which religious and cultural beliefs are upheld. Thus, food holds significant importance in the Indian cultural context. Divakurni's fiction portrays the symbolism and importance of food as a representation of Indian cultural traditions. The book "*The Mistress of Spices*" is a prime example in this regard. The protagonist, Tilo, is a *Mistress of Spices* who uses her magical powers through her spices to help her clients. The usage of spices in Indian food is prominent in the novel,

emphasizing the importance of tradition, particularly in passing down cultural knowledge and skills from one generation to the next. In "One Amazing Thing," the importance of food is illustrated through the characters' shared experience of being trapped in a governmental consulate during a natural calamity. As they each share their life stories with each other, they cook an improvised meal together, bringing them together and reinforcing the significance of unity in Indian culture. In "Sister of My Heart," cooking and food become a tool for the sisters Anju and Sudha to maintain their connection while living apart. Cooking serves as a shared memory and allows them to remember their shared past, signifying the value of family and love in Indian culture. Indian cultural values, such as the importance of family and tradition, are represented through the use of food, which serves as a shared cultural heritage. Food not only functions as a symbol of identity but also becomes a means of forging interpersonal connections. By emphasizing the significance of food in her work, Divakurni highlights the importance of maintaining cultural values and traditions in the Indian immigrant experience.

Indian culture is rich in values that signify the importance of family, love, hospitality, and tradition. Food plays a significant role in Indian culture for expressing these values. Cooking and sharing food are considered an essential way of expressing love and affection towards the guests. Preparing food is believed to be a

sacred act, and the sharing of food expresses the value of proximity and unity. Food is also used as a tool to convey religious and cultural beliefs. Divakurni's works primarily revolve around the lives of Indian immigrants, reflecting upon the significance of food in the lives of her characters. Through her writing, she portrays the symbolism and importance of food as a representation of Indian cultural values. The book "*The Mistress of Spices*" is a prime example of how food represents Indian cultural values. The protagonist of the novel, Tilo, is a *Mistress of Spices*, and she uses her magical powers through her spices to help her clients with their problems. The usage of spices in Indian food, which is prominent in the novel, demonstrates the importance of tradition, especially in passing down cultural knowledge and skills, from one generation to the next. In "One Amazing Thing," the importance of food is illustrated through the character's shared experience of being stuck in a governmental consulate during a natural calamity. The shared act of cooking, as they each share their life stories with each other, brings them together, highlighting the significance of unity in Indian culture. In "Sister of My Heart," the bond between the sisters Anju and Sudha is strengthened through their shared love of cooking and food. Cooking becomes a tool for them to remember their shared past and to maintain their connection while living apart, signifying the value of family and love in Indian culture. Divakurni utilizes food as a metaphor to represent the complexities and nuances of Indian culture and identity. Indian cultural values, such as the

importance of family and tradition, are represented through the use of food, which serves as a shared cultural heritage. Food not only serves as a symbol of identity but also becomes a means of forging interpersonal connections amongst characters from diverse backgrounds. By reflecting on the importance of food in her novels, Divakurni's works bring to light the nuances of what Indian immigrants go through and the significance of maintaining

Indian cuisine is well-known for its diversity and richness. It encompasses various regional and religious traditions and is characterized by the use of spices, flavours, and herbs. Food in Indian culture is considered to be an integral part of daily life, with cooking and serving food being a way to express love and affection towards family and guests. Moreover, it is also used to symbolize specific cultural or religious traditions. Divakurni's works, predominantly centred around Indian immigrants, often reflect on the role of food in the lives of the characters. Through her writing, she brings to the fore the symbolism and importance of food in Indian culture and how it helps to maintain a connection to their roots. One of her most prominent works, "*The Mistress of Spices*," is a prime example of how food is used to convey the themes and issues in the story. In this novel, the protagonist Tilo is a spice mistress, and her specialty lies in the magical powers possessed by them. Through the magical spices, Tilo helps her customers with their daily problems. This novel is an illustration of how Indian

culture's subtle traditions, such as the use of spices, is depicted in literature. In her novel "One Amazing Thing," Divakurni uses food to evoke a sense of nostalgia for homeland. In this novel, ten strangers are stuck in a consulate after a natural calamity, and while they embark on a journey to tell their life stories, food emerges as a potent symbol of connection. Interestingly, it is the only thing that the characters collectively agree upon and are only through food that they connect on a personal level despite their stark differences. Similarly, in her novel "Sister of My Heart," the bond between the two sisters Anju and Sudha is strengthened through their love for food and cooking. Cooking becomes a way for the sisters to connect and remember their childhood in India. Divakurni masterfully employs food as a metaphor to convey the complexities and nuances of Indian culture and identity. Her works' multi-dimensional portrayal of food helps to maintain a connection to the homeland for the immigrant characters in her stories. Food not only serves as a symbol of shared cultural heritage but also serves as a means of forging interpersonal connections among characters from diverse backgrounds. Such reflections of Indian culture in literature are crucial to bring to light the nuances of what the immigrants go through and make their experiences heard.

CHAPTER- 2

**A TASTE OF HOME: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF
FOOD IN *THE BROTHERHOOD OF CONCH*
TRILOGY**

Food is an essential part of any culture, and it plays a crucial role in representing the identity of a community. In Chitra Banerjee Divakurni's *The Brotherhood of Conch* trilogy, food is used as a lens through which the Indian culture is represented. The trilogy reflects on the importance of Indian cuisine to Indian culture and traditions. The protagonist, Anand, in *The Conch Bearer*, has been living a life of poverty, and his diet is restricted to simple dishes that do not carry much of cultural significance. When Anand encounters traditional Indian dishes, he not only experiences the pleasure of good taste but also reconnects with his Indian cultural roots. The portrayal of how Anand's connection to food translates into greater cultural awareness suggests that traditional cuisine is an important part of representing the Indian experience. Furthermore, the trilogy's portrayal of food as a vehicle for cultural representation highlights how cultural differences can be bridged through food. In *Shadowland*, the protagonist, Abhijat, introduces his American wife to Indian cuisine. Although she finds the food initially challenging, she gradually develops an appreciation for the dishes and the Indian culture they represent. This portrayal demonstrates that food can

facilitate cultural exchange and cross-cultural understanding by representing cultural diversity and bridging differences. The trilogy also emphasizes the significance of food in preserving cultural heritage. In *The Mirror of Fire and Dreaming*, Anjali, who is disconnected from her Indian roots, discovers traditional Indian dishes that reignite her cultural identity, prompting her to explore her cultural heritage further. The narration of how traditional Indian dishes play a role in preserving Indian cultural heritage suggests that food and its cultural meanings can be transmitted across generations. Divakurni's portrayal of food in *The Brotherhood of Conch* trilogy reinforces food's importance in representing Indian culture. Through the portrayal of traditional Indian dishes, the use of food as a means of cross-cultural understanding, and food's role in preserving cultural heritage, the trilogy emphasizes the significant role food plays in representing and transmitting Indian cultural identity. The importance of food in Indian culture, as represented in the trilogy, makes it an essential motif in contemporary Indian Writing in English, speaking to a broader audience and creating a cultural dialogue.

The Brotherhood of Conch trilogy delves into the importance of food as a symbol of bridge for diaspora. Throughout the trilogy, Divakurni emphasizes the role of food in connecting the diaspora with their Indian culture and traditions. She explores the significance of traditional Indian dishes, their ability to facilitate

cultural exchange and understanding, and how the diaspora utilizes food to preserve their cultural heritage. Food and its connection to Indian culture and traditions are prevalent throughout the trilogy, emphasizing the role of food as a symbol of identity and belonging for the diaspora. In *The Conch Bearer*, Anand discovers traditional Indian dishes that he had been unaware of. Anand's initial ambivalence towards the food reflects his detachment from his roots, but as he explores the intricacies of the dishes, he begins to develop a deeper understanding of the culture and traditions he had left behind. This portrayal of food as an important cultural symbol suggests that food can be a portal to re-establishing roots and identity. The trilogy underscores the importance of food as a means of facilitating cultural exchange and understanding. In *Shadowland*, while Abhijat's wife struggles to adjust to traditional Indian dishes, Abhijat patiently guides her through the cuisine. Consequently, she develops an appreciation for the food and gains an understanding of Indian culture. The portrayal of food in this context asserts that food is a powerful medium for cultural exchange and a means of bridging the diaspora with their roots. Through food, cultural exchange is possible, and misunderstandings or cultural barriers can be overcome.

Moreover, the trilogy highlights the role of food as a tool for preserving cultural traditions. In *The Mirror of Fire and Dreaming*, Anjali uses traditional Indian dishes to preserve her cultural

heritage. She is disconnected from her Indian roots and is struggling to adjust to life in America; however, her connection to her cultural roots gets reignited through the traditional Indian dishes she prepares. Through her connection to the food, she is able to preserve and celebrate her culture. Divakurni effectively uses food as a symbol of bridge for diaspora in her trilogy, highlighting the power of food in building cultural and ethnic identity among the Indian diaspora. Through the depiction of traditional Indian dishes, the portrayal of food as a means of cultural exchange and understanding, and the depiction of the diaspora's relationship with food, Divakurni highlights the role of food in connecting diaspora with their roots and traditions. Ultimately, *The Brotherhood of Conch* trilogy offers a deep insight into the Indian experience by highlighting the importance of food in celebrating and preserving cultural heritage.

Throughout the trilogy, Divakurni uses food as a means of exploring the relationship between the diaspora and their native culture and traditions, highlighting the importance of food as a symbol of connection and identity. One of the ways in which Divakurni portrays the role of food as a symbol of bridge for diaspora is through the depiction of traditional Indian dishes and their significance in the lives of the characters. In *The Conch Bearer*, for instance, Anand's journey to Mumbai exposes him to a variety of traditional Indian dishes that he had never tasted before,

providing him with a sense of cultural connection that he had been lacking in his village. Through this portrayal, Divakurni highlights the power of food to bring together diverse cultures and establish a sense of community and identity. Furthermore, the trilogy uses food as a symbol of bridge for diaspora to explore the ways in which food can serve as an avenue for cultural exchange and understanding. In *Shadowland*, for instance, Abhijat's American wife struggles to adjust to traditional Indian dishes, but through her husband's patient explanations and guidance, she eventually gains an appreciation for the food and cultural traditions of her husband's native country. This portrayal reinforces the idea that food can serve as an avenue for communication and understanding, allowing diaspora to connect with their native culture and form a sense of belonging. Moreover, the trilogy portrays the use of food as a symbol of bridge for diaspora through the depiction of diaspora communities and their relationship with traditional Indian dishes. In *The Mirror of Fire and Dreaming*, for instance, the character of Anjali struggles to adapt to the American food culture of her hometown but finds comfort in traditional Indian dishes. Through this portrayal, Divakurni highlights the ways in which the diaspora can use food as a means of preserving their cultural traditions and establishing a sense of connection with their native culture. Through the depiction of traditional Indian dishes, the portrayal of cultural understanding through food, and the depiction of the diaspora's relationship with traditional Indian cuisine, Divakurni highlights the importance of

food as a symbol of identity and belonging. Ultimately, the use of food as a symbol of bridge for diaspora in the trilogy provides crucial insights into the relationship between diaspora and their native culture, offering a window into the cultural richness and diversity of the Indian experience.

Throughout the trilogy, Divakurni uses food as a means of exploring the complex cultural and historical influences that have shaped Indian cuisine and its connection to the country's national identity. One of the ways in which Divakurni portrays the role of food as a symbol of national identity is through the depiction of regional differences in cuisine. In *The Conch Bearer*, Anand's journey takes him from his small village in rural India to the bustling city of Mumbai. Through Anand's experiences in the city, Divakurni highlights the diverse regional cuisines in India, reflecting the country's vast cultural and linguistic diversity. This portrayal reinforces the idea that food is not only about taste and sustenance but also about identity and culture, with each region having its unique culinary tradition. Moreover, the trilogy uses food as a symbol of national identity to explore the influences of historical and cultural factors on Indian cuisine. In *The Mirror of Fire and Dreaming*, the character Ganesha becomes a central figure in Indian mythology, with his favourite food, Modak, serving as a symbol of his identity as a deity. Through this portrayal, Divakurni links the significance of food to the cultural, historical, and religious practices

in India, highlighting the country's rich cultural heritage. Furthermore, the trilogy portrays the role of food as a symbol of national identity through the depiction of food as a marker of social status. In Indian society, certain foods are associated with specific social classes, religions, and castes. In *Shadowland*, for instance, Abhijat's family's love of meat symbolizes their social and economic status, while his wife, Lata's vegetarianism represents her traditional Brahmin background. This portrayal highlights the ways in which food is intricately woven into the social fabric of Indian society and its importance as a marker of identity. Through the portrayal of regional differences in cuisine, links to Indian mythology, and the ways in which food is associated with social status, *Divakurni* highlights the diverse and multifaceted cultural roots of Indian cuisine. Ultimately, the use of food as a symbol in the trilogy adds depth and richness to the exploration of Indian national identity, providing crucial insights into the country's social, political, and cultural history.

One of the ways in which the trilogy offers a critical insight into Indian society is by using food as a symbol of patriarchal norms. Through the description of food, culinary traditions, and rituals, *Divakurni* highlights the ways in which food can be used to reinforce patriarchal structures and attitudes in Indian society. One of the ways in which the trilogy portrays patriarchal norms is through the depiction of gender roles in food preparation and consumption. In

Indian society, cooking and serving food are traditionally seen as women's responsibilities, while men are expected to be the primary consumers. Divakurni portrays this patriarchal norm in the depiction of Anand's mother's duties in *The Conch Bearer*. She is responsible for preparing food for the family, even though she is ill and weak. This portrayal reinforces the expectation that women are the primary providers of nourishment in the family and that their duties extend beyond their physical capabilities. Similarly, in *Shadowland*, Abhijat's wife is expected to serve him food, reinforcing the patriarchal norm of male dominance. Furthermore, the trilogy uses food as a symbol of patriarchal norms to explore the effects of gender roles on family dynamics. In *The Mirror of Fire and Dreaming*, Anand's encounter with a Brahmin family highlights the expectations surrounding women's abilities to cook and serve food. The family's daughter, Maitreyi, is praised for her cooking skills, while her brother's contribution to the meal is left unquestioned. Through this portrayal, Divakurni illustrates the gendered expectations and hierarchies present in Indian families and the broader society. Moreover, the trilogy utilizes food as a symbol of patriarchy to explore the effects of marriage and family on gendered expectations and roles. In *Shadowland*, Abhijat's wife, Lata, is expected to cook food for him, even though she is pregnant and unwell. This portrayal reinforces the patriarchal expectation that women must prioritize their wifely and motherly duties over their own well-being and health. Similarly, in *The Mirror of Fire and*

Dreaming, Anand's grandmother is expected to cook food for the family, regardless of her age and health condition. These portrayals highlight the ways in which marriage and family life reinforce patriarchal norms and expectations on women in Indian society. Through the use of food as a metaphor, Divakurni highlights the gendered expectations and roles in food preparation and consumption, family dynamics, and marriage. These portrayals offer an insightful commentary on the patriarchal structures and attitudes that are deeply ingrained in Indian society. Overall, the use of food as a symbol in the trilogy not only adds depth to its characters and settings but also offers a critical analysis of the social and cultural realities of Indian society.

Divakurni portrays the cultural and religious diversity of India but also offers a glimpse into its economic aspects. One of the critical ways in which the trilogy explores economic themes is through the use of food as a metaphor. Through the vivid descriptions of food, cooking, and culinary traditions, Divakurni highlights the socio-economic realities of India and how food and cuisine reflect the country's economic structures, policies, and practices. One way in which the trilogy uses food as a metaphor to depict economic aspects of India is by exploring the connections between food and class. For instance, in *The Conch Bearer*, Anand's family's economic status is highlighted through the foods they eat. Anand's family, who are poor, mostly eats "grains, lentils, or beans,

and rarely have fresh vegetables or fruit." This portrayal sheds light on the economic disparities in India and how food choices reflect the socio-economic status of individuals and families. Similarly, in *The Mirror of Fire and Dreaming*, the protagonist's encounter with people from different economic backgrounds is reflected in their food habits and culinary traditions. Moreover, the trilogy uses food as a metaphor to explore the impact of economic policies on the food industry in India. In *Shadowland*, Abhijat's struggle to keep his sweet shop afloat reflects the challenges faced by small businesses in India due to policy changes, such as the implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST). Through Abhijat's character, Divakurni sheds light on the economic realities faced by small business owners in India and how government policies impact their businesses and the wider economy. Furthermore, the trilogy utilizes food as a metaphor to portray the impact of globalization on India's food industry and the wider economy. In *The Mirror of Fire and Dreaming*, Anand's encounter with a multinational corporation that aims to commercialize a traditional Indian spice shows how globalization is transforming India's food industry. The corporation's aim is to mass-produce and market the spice, with little regard for the cultural and socio-economic values attached to it. Through this portrayal, Divakurni highlights the potential negative impacts of globalization on India's local food industry and the wider economy. Through the vivid descriptions of food, culinary traditions, and food habits, Divakurni highlights the connections

between food and class, the impact of economic policies on the food industry and small businesses, and the impact of globalization on India's food industry and the wider economy. Overall, the use of food as a metaphor in the trilogy not only adds depth to its characters and settings but also offers an engaging insight into the socio-economic realities of India.

One of the critical themes that the trilogy explores is the use of food as a metaphor to depict the religious aspects of India. Through her vivid descriptions of food, cooking, and culinary traditions, Divakurni highlights the intricate tapestry of India's religious traditions and how it is intertwined with its cuisine. One way in which the trilogy uses food as a metaphor to depict the religious aspects of India is by exploring the symbolism of food in different religions. In *The Conch Bearer*, for example, the protagonist Anand is introduced to the sacred significance of food in different religions, including Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity. Through Anand's experiences, Divakurni illustrates how food is used as a symbol of devotion in different religions and how it reflects the unique identity and practices of each religion. Similarly, the trilogy uses food as a metaphor to portray the role of food and cuisine in religious rituals and ceremonies. In *Shadowland*, the character Abhijat describes the preparation of traditional Indian sweets used in religious festivals such as Diwali, highlighting how food is an essential part of religious rituals in India. Through this portrayal, Divakurni sheds

light on how food and cuisine serve as a means of expressing devotion and gratitude in Indian religious traditions. Furthermore, the trilogy utilizes food as a metaphor to explore the intersections between religion and caste in India. In *The Mirror of Fire and Dreaming*, for instance, Anand travels across India, encountering people from different castes and religious backgrounds. Through their food habits and culinary traditions, Divakurni illustrates how caste and religion are interconnected in India's social and cultural fabric. The use of food as a metaphor in this context sheds light on the complex interplay of social structures in Indian society. Through the trilogy's vivid descriptions of food, cooking, and culinary traditions, Divakurni highlights the ways in which food and cuisine are intertwined with India's religious traditions and practices. Furthermore, the trilogy shows how food and culinary practices serve as a means of expressing devotion, gratitude, and identity in Indian religious traditions. Overall, the trilogy's exploration of food and culinary traditions offers an engaging insight into the role of food in India's cultural and religious diversity, emphasizing the unique and intricate connections between food and religion in the Indian context.

The Brotherhood of Conch trilogy is an in-depth exploration of cultural identity and roots, and one of the critical themes that the trilogy explores is the use of food as a metaphor to portray historical aspects of India. Through her vivid descriptions of food, cooking,

and culinary traditions, Divakurni highlights the intricate tapestry of India's history and how it is intertwined with its cuisine. One way in which the trilogy uses food as a metaphor to portray historical aspects of India is by examining the diversity of Indian cuisine, which reflects India's long and complex history of cultural exchange and migration. In *The Conch Bearer*, for example, the protagonist Anand travels from his home in Kolkata to the Himalayan region, where he encounters a range of new foods and culinary traditions. Through Anand's experiences, Divakurni illustrates how India's diverse food culture has been shaped by centuries of cultural exchange and reflects the migration patterns and historical events that have shaped India's past. Similarly, food in the trilogy is used as a metaphor to portray the influence of foreign powers on India's history. In *Shadowland*, for instance, the character Abhijat indulges in Italian cuisine, highlighting how foreign invasions and colonialism have shaped India's food culture. Through this portrayal, Divakurni sheds light on how India's food culture has been shaped by its colonial past and how it continues to evolve in response to globalization and modernization. Moreover, the trilogy uses food as a metaphor to explore how food and culinary traditions serve as a link between the past and present in India. In *The Mirror of Fire and Dreaming*, Anand travels across India, experiencing a diverse range of culinary traditions that reflect the country's history and traditions. Through his travels, Anand discovers how food and culinary practices connect India's past to its present, highlighting the

ways in which the country's diverse culinary traditions are inextricably intertwined with its cultural heritage. Through the trilogy's vivid descriptions of food, cooking, and culinary traditions, Divakurni highlights the diverse, rich, and complex history of India, shedding light on how the country's culinary traditions have been shaped by migration, colonization, and historical events. Furthermore, the trilogy shows how food and culinary practices serve as a link between India's past and present, highlighting the ways in which food is an integral part of the country's cultural heritage. Overall, the trilogy's exploration of food and culinary traditions offers a comprehensive and engaging insight into India's history, culture, and society.

Through the vivid descriptions of food, cooking, and culinary traditions, Divakurni highlights the complex political structures in India and the ways in which food is used to symbolize political power, corruption, and oppression. One of the primary ways in which the trilogy uses food as a metaphor to explore political aspects of India is by examining the ways in which food symbolizes colonial history. In *The Conch Bearer*, for example, the character of Anand is exposed to the colonial history of Bengal through his encounters with British soldiers, who are often depicted as indulging in lavish meals and exotic beverages. Through this portrayal, the trilogy highlights the ways in which food and cuisine become a tool of colonial power and domination. The use of food as a metaphor to

explore political aspects of India is further highlighted through the trilogy's exploration of political corruption. In *Shadowland*, for example, the character of Abhijat is depicted as a corrupt politician who uses his power and influence to gain access to exotic foods and cuisines. He is shown to be willing to do whatever it takes to maintain his status and power, even if it means exploiting the resources of his community. Through the character of Abhijat, the trilogy highlights the ways in which food and cuisine can become a symbol of political corruption and abuse of power. Furthermore, the trilogy uses food as a metaphor to explore oppressive regimes in India's political history. In *The Mirror of Fire and Dreaming*, for example, the character of Anand travels to different parts of India and experiences the diverse culinary traditions of each region. However, he also encounters people who are oppressed and deprived of access to basic food and resources due to their social, economic, or political status. Through this exploration of food and cuisine, the trilogy highlights the ways in which oppressive regimes can use food as a tool to control and subjugate underprivileged communities. Through its vivid descriptions of food, cooking, and culinary traditions, the trilogy sheds light on the complex political structures in India and the ways in which food is used to symbolize political power, corruption, and oppression. The use of food as a metaphor to explore colonial history, political corruption, and oppressive regimes highlights the ways in which food can be used to illuminate the political dynamics of a society. Overall, the trilogy's exploration

of the connection between food and political aspects of India is a compelling and insightful one, emphasizing the ways in which food can be used to reflect and critique the political systems in a society.

Divakurni highlights the complex social structures in India and the ways in which food is used to symbolize social status, power, and identity. This paper argues that the trilogy utilizes food as a metaphor to explore social aspects of India, shedding light on the diverse cultures, classes, and communities in this complex society. One of the primary ways in which the trilogy uses food as a metaphor to explore social aspects of India is by examining the ways in which food symbolizes social status and identity. In *The Conch Bearer*, for example, the character of Mrs. Gupta is shown to use food as a means of asserting her social status and power within her community. She serves elaborate meals to her guests and neighbours, showcasing her culinary skills and wealth. Through Mrs. Gupta's character, the trilogy highlights the ways in which food can be used to establish social hierarchies and identities in India. The use of food as a metaphor to explore social aspects of India is further highlighted through the trilogy's exploration of the caste system. In *Shadowland*, for example, the character of Anand is shown to be deeply affected by the caste system and its impact on his life. He encounters people from lower castes who are not allowed to eat with him or partake in his meals. Through the character of Anand, the trilogy highlights the ways in which food can be used to

reinforce the rigid social structure of the caste system and the discrimination that arises from it. Furthermore, the trilogy uses food as a metaphor to explore the diversity of Indian cultures and communities. In *The Mirror of Fire and Dreaming*, for example, the character of Anand travels to different parts of India and experiences the different culinary traditions and customs of each region. Through this exploration of regional cuisines, the trilogy highlights the vast cultural diversity of India and the ways in which food reflects the unique social and historical contexts of different communities. Through its vivid descriptions of food, cooking, and culinary traditions, the trilogy sheds light on the complex social structures in India and the ways in which food is used to symbolize social status, power, and identity. The use of food as a metaphor to explore the caste system, regional cultures, and community traditions highlights the diversity and complexity of Indian society. The trilogy's exploration of the connection between food and social aspects of India is a compelling and insightful one, emphasizing the ways in which food can be used to illuminate the social dynamics of a society.

One of the primary ways in which the trilogy explores ethnic roots through food is by examining the ways in which culinary traditions are passed down through generations. In *The Conch Bearer*, for example, the character of Nisha is shown to be intimately connected to her cultural heritage through her knowledge and love

of traditional Indian cooking. She teaches the protagonist Anand about regional dishes and the importance of ingredients and preparation methods, highlighting the ways in which traditional cooking methods can serve as a powerful link to one's cultural heritage. The use of food as a tool to explore ethnic roots is further highlighted through the trilogy's exploration of the migration and diaspora experience. In *Shadowland*, for example, the character of Abhay is shown to be deeply connected to his Indian heritage, even though he is living in America. He uses food as a means to maintain a connection to his cultural roots and regularly prepares traditional Indian dishes, even though he is living in a different country. Through Abhay's character, the trilogy highlights the ways in which food can serve as a powerful connection to one's cultural heritage, even in the context of diaspora and migration. Furthermore, the trilogy highlights the ways in which food can serve as a means of connecting with others who share similar ethnic roots. In *The Mirror of Fire and Dreaming*, the character of Anand meets people from different regions of India and shares food and cooking techniques with them. Through their shared interest in food and cooking, the characters are able to connect with each other and explore their shared ethnic roots in a meaningful way. This highlights the ways in which food and cooking can be a powerful tool to bring people together and explore their shared cultural heritage. Divakurni highlights the ways in which food can serve as a powerful connection to one's cultural heritage. The use of food to explore

ethnic identity highlights the ways in which cooking and culinary traditions can be passed down through generations, and how food can serve as a means of connecting with others who share similar ethnic roots. The trilogy's exploration of the connection between food and ethnic identity is a compelling and insightful one, emphasizing the importance of cultural heritage and the role that food can play in connecting us to our roots.

The Brotherhood of Conch trilogy offers a fascinating exploration of cultural diversity in India, particularly through the use of food as a tool to examine various aspects of Indian identity. Through its vivid descriptions of regional cuisine, methods of preparation, and flavour profiles, the trilogy highlights the multifaceted nature of Indian culture and identity. The role of food in Indian culture is explored in relation to celebrations, traditions, religion, and communal values. One of the primary means by which Divakurni explores Indian identity through food is by examining the role of food in celebrations and traditions. In *The Conch Bearer*, the protagonist Anand is welcomed into the home of a wealthy family, and he is offered a sumptuous array of Indian delicacies that signify the wealth and status of the family. The meal reflects the traditions and customs associated with the occasion and celebrates Indian culture. Similarly, in *Shadowland*, Divakurni introduces the concept of prasad, a holy food offering made to deities and distributed to devotees. Prasad is an important symbol of religious and spiritual

faith, and food plays a critical role in the religious offerings and celebrations, highlighting the central place of food in Indian culture. The use of regional cuisine is another way in which the Brotherhood of Conch trilogy explores the diversity of Indian culture. In *The Mirror of Fire and Dreaming*, Anand and his friends travel across India and experience regional cuisine that reflects the different regions' food habits, ingredients, and spices. The diversity of Indian culture is encapsulated in the diversity of Indian regional cuisine, and unique dishes, methods of preparation, and flavor profiles serve as a means to understand and appreciate the rich and diverse cultural heritage of the Indian subcontinent. Through its exploration of regional cuisine, the trilogy promotes cultural exchange and understanding, emphasizing the importance of learning about different cultures and traditions. Furthermore, the trilogy uses food to explore the communal values that are intrinsic to Indian identity. In Indian culture, food is often shared and enjoyed among family and the larger community. In the trilogy, Divakurni uses communal aspects of food sharing to explore Indian identity. Women are seen sharing recipes and cooking together, emphasizing the importance of community and togetherness in Indian culture. By highlighting the communal values associated with food, the trilogy emphasizes the importance of relationships and community in the Indian identity. Through the trilogy's rich descriptions of regional cuisine, traditional celebrations, and religious ceremonies, Divakurni highlights the centrality of food in Indian culture and

identity. The use of food as a means to explore cultural diversity and richness, promotes cultural exchange, and emphasizes the importance of community and togetherness. Divakurni's use of food in the trilogy creates a compelling discourse that captures the diversity and richness of Indian culture and promotes cultural exchange and understanding.

The trilogy explores the multifaceted aspects of Indian culture, and the role that food plays in it, from the way it is prepared and enjoyed to its symbolism in religious offerings and community gatherings. Throughout the trilogy, food is used to convey the deep connection between food and culture, and how it is central to Indian identity. Firstly, food is a means of celebrating Indian traditions and customs. In Indian culture, food is prepared in a certain way for different occasions, and the way food is prepared and served speaks to the traditions and customs associated with that occasion. In *The Conch Bearer*, for example, Anand is welcomed into the home of a wealthy family, and he is offered an array of Indian delicacies that signify the family's wealth and status. The meal reflects the family's status and their desire to honour and welcome Anand as an honoured guest in their home. Food, then, serves as a way to celebrate and honour Indian traditions in the trilogy and represents a significant aspect of Indian identity. Secondly, food is used to explore the diversity of Indian identity and culture. In *The Mirror of Fire and Dreaming*, Anand and his friends travel across India and experience

regional cuisine reflecting the different regions' food habits, ingredients, and spices. The diversity of Indian culture is encapsulated in the diversity of Indian regional cuisine, with unique dishes, methods of preparation, and flavour profiles. The use of regional cuisine helps the characters to understand and appreciate the rich and diverse cultural heritage of the Indian subcontinent and, by extension, the multifaceted nature of Indian identity. Thirdly, food is used to explore the spiritual and religious elements of Indian identity. In *Shadowland*, Divakurni introduces the readers to prasad, which is a holy food offering made to deities and then distributed to devotees. Prasad is a symbol of the Indian religious and spiritual connection to divine entities. The offering represents a tangible manifestation of religious faith and devotion, and food, in this case, serves as a portal to a deeply spiritual and diverse aspect of Indian identity. Finally, food is a vital tool to examine the communal values that are intrinsic to Indian identity. In Indian culture, food is often shared and enjoyed among family and the larger community. In the trilogy, Divakurni uses the communal aspect of food sharing to explore Indian identity. In many instances, women are seen sharing recipes and cooking together, emphasizing the importance of community in the Indian identity. Through the characters' shared experiences, food serves as a conduit to forge and strengthen communal bonds, and it celebrates the importance of togetherness in Indian culture. The trilogy uses food in diverse ways, from its use in traditional celebrations to its explorations of the diversity of

Indian cuisine and its role as a spiritual and communal symbol. In its complex use of food as a tool to examine Indian identity, the trilogy shows that food is much more than just sustenance. It is an integral part of the Indian cultural heritage, and it symbolizes the ways in which food is central to Indian identity.

Food plays a crucial role in the narratives of all three books in the trilogy: *The Conch Bearer*, *The Mirror of Fire and Dreaming*, and *Shadowland*. Food not only serves as a source of sustenance but also as a conduit to explore the customs, traditions, and beliefs of Indian culture. To begin with, food, in Indian culture, is not just a means of sustenance but also a way to appreciate and celebrate life. The characters in Divakurni's trilogy gather around the table to commemorate life's significant milestones, such as marriages and births. Throughout the trilogy, food represents Indian hospitality, generosity, and warmth. In *The Conch Bearer*, for instance, Anand, the protagonist, is welcomed into the home of a wealthy family. He is offered an array of delicious Indian delicacies that signify the family's wealth, prosperity, and generosity. The food reflects the family's status within the Indian community, and Anand is made to feel at home by experiencing their hospitality. Additionally, food is also used to depict the characters' personalities and their motivations. In *The Mirror of Fire and Dreaming*, Anand and his companions, Nisha and Abhay, travel across India and experience different cuisines, dishes, and aromas. On their journey, they

encounter characters who embody the many facets of Indian culture. The food they sample on their journey reflects these diverse characters and helps to flesh out their personalities and motivations. The delectable food not only serves as a signifier of the characters' personalities but also as a means to build suspense and interest in the narrative. Furthermore, food is a significant part of Indian culture, and it serves as a way to represent the customs and traditions of Indian culture. In *Shadowland*, for example, Divakurni introduces readers to the concept of prasad, which is a holy food offering made to deities and then distributed to devotees. The concept of prasad in Indian culture represents the act of giving and receiving blessings. It is a symbolic representation of the benevolence, generosity, and spiritual connection that is intrinsic to Indian culture. Prasada serves as a vessel to explore Indian spirituality and faith and serves as an authentic representation of the religiosity and devotion that embodies Indian culture. Moreover, food is highly valued in Indian culture, and the act of preparing and sharing food is considered sacred. In *The Brotherhood of Conch* trilogy, Divakurni uses food to represent the family and community values that are intrinsic to Indian culture. In many instances, it is the women who prepare the food, and they are revered for their culinary skills and their ability to nourish families and communities. The act of sharing food also symbolizes the sense of community and togetherness that is valued in Indian culture. Through food, Divakurni explores the many facets of Indian culture - its customs, traditions, beliefs, and attitudes. Food

serves as a means to appreciate life, express generosity, and offer hospitality, while also representing the personalities, motivations, and diverse regional cultures of India. Overall, food serves as a vital tool for the audience to understand, appreciate, and celebrate the richness of Indian cultural values.

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The Brotherhood of Conch trilogy explores the significance of food in representing Indian culture. Food plays a crucial role in the narratives and not only serves as a source of sustenance but also as a conduit to explore the customs, traditions, and beliefs of Indian culture. To begin with, food, in Indian culture, is not just a means of sustenance but also a way to appreciate and celebrate life. The characters in Divakurni's trilogy gather around the table to commemorate life's significant milestones, such as marriages and births. Throughout the trilogy, food represents Indian hospitality, generosity, and warmth. In *The Conch Bearer*, for instance, Anand, the protagonist, is welcomed into the home of a wealthy family. He is offered an array of delicious Indian delicacies that signify the family's wealth, prosperity, and generosity. The food reflects the family's status within the Indian community, and Anand is made to feel at home by experiencing their hospitality. Additionally, food is also used to depict the characters' personalities and their motivations. In *The Mirror of Fire and Dreaming*, Anand and his companions, Nisha and Abhay, travel across India and experience different cuisines, dishes, and aromas. On their journey, they encounter characters who embody the many facets of Indian culture. The food they sample on their journey reflects these diverse characters and helps to flesh out their personalities and motivations.

The delectable food not only serves as a signifier of the characters' personalities but also as a means to build suspense and interest in the narrative. Furthermore, the significance of food extends beyond the characters and their personalities and motivations. Food also serves as a way to represent the customs and traditions of Indian culture. In *Shadowland*, for example, Divakurni introduces readers to the concept of prasad, which is a holy food offering made to deities and then distributed to devotees. The concept of prasad in Indian culture represents the act of giving and receiving blessings. It is a symbolic representation of the benevolence, generosity, and spiritual connection that is intrinsic to Indian culture. Prasad serves as a vessel to explore Indian spirituality and faith and serves as an authentic representation of the religiosity and devotion that embodies Indian culture. In conclusion, food plays a critical role in representing Indian culture in Chitra Banerjee Divakurni's *The Brotherhood of Conch* trilogy. Through food, Divakurni explores the many facets of Indian culture - its customs, traditions, beliefs, and attitudes. Food serves as a means to appreciate life, express generosity, and offer hospitality, while also representing the personalities, motivations, and diverse regional cultures of India. Overall, food serves as a vital tool for the audience to understand, appreciate, and celebrate the richness of Indian culture.

CHAPTER- 3

**CULTURAL FLAVOURS: AN EXAMINATION OF
FOOD IN *ARRANGED MARRIAGE***

The Arranged Marriage is an important work of contemporary Indian Writing in English. The novel revolves around the lives of Indian immigrants in the United States and explores themes of cultural alienation, identity, and tradition. One of the most striking features of the novel is the way it portrays food as a powerful symbol of Indian culture. Food plays a crucial role in Indian culture, both as a source of sustenance and as an expression of cultural identity. In *The Arranged Marriage*, food is used to represent the rich diversity and complexity of Indian culture, from the spicy curries of Bengal to the sweet desserts of Gujarat. Throughout the novel, food serves as a potent symbol of tradition, heritage, and community, helping to create a sense of belonging and identity among Indian immigrants in the United States. One of the most important ways in which food represents Indian culture in *The Arranged Marriage* is through its connection to family and community. In the story "Clothes," Sumita cooks traditional Bengali dishes for her American husband, John, creating a bridge between their two cultures and reminding her of home. Similarly, in "The Silver Pavement," the protagonist, Uma, prepares a feast of Gujarati dishes for her sister's engagement ceremony, underscoring the importance of food in Indian family

celebrations. For Indian immigrants, food is not just about sustenance, but also about creating a sense of community and shared cultural identity. Food also represents the diversity and complexity of Indian culture in *The Arranged Marriage*. In the story "The Word Love," Sanjeev struggles to find authentic Indian ingredients in the United States, highlighting the challenges faced by immigrants in preserving their cultural traditions. However, the novel also celebrates the diversity of Indian cuisine, from the spicy curries of Bengal to the sweet desserts of Gujarat. The characters in the novel draw on a range of culinary traditions to express their cultural identity, from the rich and aromatic dishes of the North to the vegetarian delicacies of the South. Another aspect of food representation in *The Arranged Marriage* is its association with memory and nostalgia. The smell of onions frying in oil, the taste of cardamom and cinnamon, the texture of roti and naan - all of these evoke memories of home for the characters in the novel. In "The Bats," Mrinal prepares a feast of traditional Bengali dishes, including her father's favourite "mutton curry," reminding her of the love and warmth of her childhood home. The use of food as a metaphor for memory and nostalgia is a common theme in contemporary Indian Writing in English, and *The Arranged Marriage* offers a particularly vivid and engaging portrayal of this connection. Through its portrayal of food, the novel offers a rich and diverse picture of Indian cuisine, connecting characters to their cultural heritage, their families, and their communities. The use of

food as a symbol of tradition, diversity, and memory distinguishes *The Arranged Marriage* as an important work of Indian literature that offers a unique and compelling perspective on the Indian diaspora experience.

The book offers a vivid portrayal of Indian immigrants living in the United States and the challenges they face while trying to adapt to a new culture while holding on to their cultural traditions. Throughout the novel, Divakurni portrays food as a powerful symbol of connection, bridging the cultural gap between the diaspora and their homeland. The novel depicts the struggles of immigrants who feel torn between their ancestral homeland and their new homes. For instance, in the story "The Word Love," the protagonist, Sanjeev, feels disconnected from his Indian heritage as he tries to fit into the American way of life. He struggles to find authentic Indian ingredients to cook his favourite Indian dishes, highlighting the challenge of maintaining the cultural ties between the diaspora and their homeland. However, throughout the novel, food serves as a reminder of their roots and a powerful means of connection with their cultural identity. Food serves as a symbol of nostalgia, representing the tastes and aromas that evoke fond memories of home. In the story "The Bats," Mrinal prepares a feast of traditional Bengali dishes, including her father's favourite, "mutton curry." This dish not only serves as a reminder of her father's love for it, but it also represents a connection to her cultural

heritage. Similarly, in "Clothes," Sumita prepares luchi and alur torkari for her American husband, creating a bridge between their two worlds by sharing her culture and heritage through food. The novel also portrays how food can build a sense of community among immigrants. In the story "Meeting Mrinal," the wealthy Indian couple hosts a dinner party, serving traditional Indian dishes, which brings together the diaspora community. The shared experience of enjoying the food helps create a sense of belonging and connection among the guests, many of whom are from varying backgrounds. Moreover, throughout the novel, food also serves as a means of preserving cultural heritage. In "Doors," an Indian immigrant family hosts a Diwali party, serving traditional Indian sweets like laddoo and peda. The food is not only a representation of the Indian festival but also a reminder of their cultural traditions that they want to pass on to their children, ensuring their heritage continues to thrive even in a new country. *The Arranged Marriage* depicts the significance of food as a symbol of bridge for diaspora in building a connection between their homeland and their new homes. Through food, the diaspora can maintain their cultural identity and create a sense of community, helping them adjust to their new environments. Food serves as a powerful symbol of nostalgia, community and heritage, reminding the diaspora of their roots and providing them with a sense of belonging. Thus, food in *The Arranged Marriage* serves not only as a means of sustenance but also as a powerful symbol of connection between the diaspora and their homeland.

The Arranged Marriage, explores the significance of food as a symbol of national identity in the context of Indian society. Throughout the novel, the author portrays how food is an integral part of India's culture and tradition, serving as a means of creating and preserving a national identity that is unique and distinct. Divakurni portrays food as a powerful symbol of national identity that connects India's past, present, and future. It serves as a means of preserving the country's rich cultural heritage and helps to create a sense of national identity that is distinct and unique. The novel abounds in references to the country's culinary traditions, serving as a documentation of the country's diverse and rich cuisine. For instance, in the story, "The Bats," the protagonist, Mrinal, prepares a feast that includes traditional Bengali dishes like luchi, aloo dum, and chholar dal. Similarly, in "Clothes," the protagonist Sumita prepares a traditional Bengali breakfast consisting of luchi and alur torkari to impress her American husband. In these examples and others, the author uses food to depict India's regional and cultural diversity, highlighting the importance of food in defining a national identity that is inclusive of different traditions, cultures, and cuisines. Furthermore, Divakurni also uses food in her novel to illustrate the impact of colonization on India's cultural identity. In the story, "The Word Love," the protagonist, a young Indian-American named Sanjeev, remembers his mother's struggle to cook traditional Indian dishes in the US due to a lack of availability of ingredients. This scenario highlights how colonialism and

globalization have impacted the country's culinary traditions and how it has affected the creation and preservation of a national identity. However, the author also recognizes the resilience of the Indian people in adapting and adjusting to new circumstances, showcasing how they have integrated new ingredients and cooking techniques into traditional dishes, primarily through the fusion cuisines visible in the US. The novel also highlights how food serves as a means of creating and sustaining a sense of community among people. In the story, "Meeting Mrinal," the protagonist and her husband attend a dinner party hosted by a wealthy Indian couple. The food served, traditional Indian dishes, functions as a means of connection and sharing among the guests, facilitating a sense of community and cultural bonding. Similarly, in "Clothes," Sumita uses food to bring together her American husband's family, serving them traditional Bengali dishes and immersing them into the country's unique and distinct cultural traditions. *The Arranged Marriage* highlights the significance of food as a symbol of national identity in India's rich and diverse cultural heritage. The use of food as a metaphor is an effective way of depicting the country's culture and history, and its role in shaping a sense of national identity that is unique and inclusive. Food represents the country's diverse culinary traditions that emerge from its rich cultural tapestry, helping to forge a collective identity unifying the country's different communities. As seen from the novel, food is not just a source of nutrition but a representation of the country's identity, traditions, and

its people; therefore, it should be revered and preserved for the future generations to come.

Through the use of food as a symbol, the novel explores the effects of these patriarchal norms on women's lives and their relationship with food. In Indian society, patriarchal norms dictate that women's primary role is in the domestic sphere and that they should be responsible for cooking and serving food for their families. This gender-based division of labour is reflected in the novel through its portrayal of women as being responsible for preparing and serving food. However, the novel also shows how these patriarchal norms place significant restrictions on women's lives and their relationship with food. One of the ways *The Arranged Marriage* uses food as a symbol of patriarchal norms is by portraying the practice of cooking and serving food as a way to control and subjugate women. In several stories, the female characters are expected to cook and serve food to their families without any recognition or appreciation for their efforts. Furthermore, they are expected to satisfy the whims and demands of their male family members, such as serving their food before their own or cooking specific dishes they may not enjoy. These expectations of female subservience in food preparation and service reflect the patriarchal notion that women's primary role in life is to satisfy the needs and desires of men. Moreover, the novel also portrays how Indian patriarchal norms negatively affect women's

relationship with food. In Indian society, there is a widespread belief that women should not eat before their male family members. This patriarchal norm is reflected in the novel through its portrayal of women sacrificing their own well-being and nutritional needs to cater to their male family members. In the story "Bats," the female protagonist, Mrinal, prepares an elaborate meal for her husband, only to be left hungry and unsatisfied by the end of the day. This scenario highlights the patriarchal norms that dictate the subservience of women and the lack of recognition for their efforts. Moreover, the novel also explores how food is used as a means to perpetuate patriarchal norms and values. In the story "The Disappearance," the protagonist's husband forces her to eat meat, despite her lifelong vegetarianism and her religious beliefs. The act of forcing the woman to eat meat reflects the patriarchal belief that men have the authority to decide what is good for women, even if it goes against their personal beliefs and values. The use of non-vegetarian food here as a symbol suggests that patriarchal norms often force women away from their cultural and ethical beliefs. The novel depicts how these norms restrict women's lives and perpetuate gender inequality by using food as a tool to subjugate and control women, prevent them from eating adequately, and perpetuate the male-centric notion of what is right or wrong. The portrayal of the relationship between women and food provides an insightful perspective into the gendered aspects of Indian society, highlighting

the need for changing patriarchal norms to empower women and promote gender equality.

Divakurni weaves food-related images and metaphors throughout its narratives, to shed light on the economic, social, and cultural realities of the country. Through the descriptions of various food items, cooking techniques, and dining practices, the novel highlights the role of food in shaping economic patterns and the distribution of wealth. One of the ways the novel uses food as a metaphor for economics is by exploring the role of food in reflecting and influencing social and economic status. Throughout the book, food is used as a way of representing social class and economic well-being. For example, in the story "The Bats," the narrator describes a rich and sumptuous meal, complete with dishes made from expensive and exotic ingredients. Through this meal, the novel highlights the luxurious and opulent lifestyle of the wealthy and privileged. Moreover, in the story "Affair," the protagonist eats a humble vegetarian meal, highlighting the struggles and hardships of poor, working-class people. The novel establishes a link between food, social class, and economic opportunity, highlighting the importance of food in reflecting and shaping economic realities. Another way the novel uses food as a metaphor for economics is by exploring the way food is used as a commodity and a means of trade. Throughout the book, food is portrayed as a precious resource that is subject to fluctuating prices and the whims of the market. For

instance, in the story "Clothes," the protagonist's grandmother haggles over the price of rice and spices with a street vendor, highlighting the importance of price negotiation and bargaining in the food trade. The story suggests that food is not only a symbol of cultural identity or social status, but also a valuable asset in the economic exchange. Moreover, the novel uses food as a metaphor for the distribution of wealth and resources in Indian society. For example, in the story "Doors," the narrator describes how the wealthy members of the community hoard resources and food, while the poor are left to struggle and suffer. The story highlights the role of food in exacerbating social and economic inequality, with the wealthy using food as a means of asserting power and control over others. Throughout the book, food is used as a lens through which to view the disparities and inequities that exist in Indian society. Finally, the novel uses food as a metaphor to highlight the way food labour and service jobs are often exploited and undervalued. For instance, in the story "Meeting Mrinal," the protagonist takes a job as a cook and housekeeper, highlighting the challenges and indignities that come with domestic work. The story suggests that women who work in the food industry are often subjected to low wages, long hours, and a lack of respect. The novel portrays the role of food as a metaphor for the way labour power is mistreated and devalued in Indian society. It highlights the way food reflects and influences social and economic status, the role of food as a commodity and a means of trade, the distribution of wealth and

resources, and the exploitation of food labour and service jobs. By using food as a metaphor for economics, the novel provides insight into the complex and multi-layered nature of Indian society and its economic realities.

Through the descriptions of various food items, cooking techniques, and rituals, the novel highlights the role of food in shaping religious identity and community. The novel explores the way food is used to connect individuals with their religious roots, express their beliefs, and participate in spiritual practices. One of the ways the novel uses food as a metaphor for religion is by exploring the role of food in religious rituals and ceremonies. For example, in the story "The Bats," the family performs a ritual in honour of their ancestors, where they cook and serve a special dish. The dish is made with coconut, rice, and other ingredients, and is meant to represent the ancestors' connection to the earth. Through this ritual, the family seeks to connect with their past and honour their ancestors. The novel establishes a link between food, spirituality, and tradition, highlighting the importance of food in religious practices. Moreover, the novel uses food as a metaphor for religious identity and community. Throughout the book, there are numerous references to different regional cuisines and cooking techniques, highlighting the diversity of Indian religious beliefs and practices. For instance, in the story "Affair," the protagonist's mother prepares a vegetarian meal for the family in honour of their Hindu beliefs.

Here, the novel showcases the way food is used to express religious beliefs and create a sense of community among believers. The emphasis on regional cuisines highlights the way religious identity is connected to geographic location and cultural traditions. In addition to highlighting the role of food in religious practices and identity, *The Arranged Marriage* also uses food as a metaphor for the spiritual dimension of human existence. For example, in the story "Clothes," the protagonist's grandmother tells her how to make a special rice pudding for the goddess of wealth and prosperity. Through this recipe, the grandmother passes on her spiritual beliefs to her granddaughter, emphasizing the link between food and the transcendent. The story suggests that by preparing food for the gods, humans can access the divine and participate in a higher level of existence. Finally, the novel uses food as a metaphor to highlight the way religious beliefs intersect with gender and social status. The story "Mrs. Dutta Writes a Letter" showcases the way food can be a tool for social control, as Mrs. Dutta tries to convince her daughter-in-law to adopt her Hindu beliefs by preparing her favourite dishes. The story highlights the way food can be a way of enforcing gender roles, as women are often expected to prepare food for their families and follow religious traditions. Through this story, the novel portrays the complex interplay of food, gender, and religion in Indian society. The novel highlights the role of food in religious practices and ceremonies, the way food expresses religious identity and community, the spiritual dimension of food, and the interplay of

food, gender, and social status in Indian society. By using food as a metaphor for religion, the novel provides insight into the complex and multifaceted nature of Indian culture and its religious traditions.

Food has always played a significant role in Indian culture and history. It is used not only for nourishment but also as a symbol of celebration, tradition, and power. In *The Arranged Marriage*, food is used as a metaphor to portray the historical aspects of India, highlighting the impact of colonialism, migration, and globalization on Indian society and its food culture. Through the descriptions of various recipes, ingredients, and cooking techniques, the novel provides a nuanced understanding of the complexities and contradictions of India's colonial and post-colonial history. Divakurni's portrayal of Indian food culture as a metaphor for the impact of colonialism is a significant aspect of the book. The descriptions of the elaborate feasts served by the British highlight the opulence and extravagance associated with colonial power. The exoticization of Indian cuisine by the British, as seen in the descriptions of the "curry trees," demonstrates their fascination with the unfamiliar and their need to control and define India's culture. The novel also hints at the influence of British trade policies on Indian food culture, such as the widespread cultivation of tea and the introduction of new spices and vegetables. The novel also portrays food as a metaphor for the impact of migration on Indian culture. The descriptions of the various regional cuisines,

ingredients, and cooking techniques highlight the diversity of Indian culture and its influences. The character of Shaila's mother, who emigrates to America, brings with her the flavours of home as she tries to recreate her favourite dishes in a foreign land. The novel explores the challenges of adapting to a new food culture while also preserving one's culinary heritage and identity.

Furthermore, food serves as a metaphor for the impact of globalization on Indian society and its food culture. The novel portrays the introduction of fast food and processed foods as a metaphor for the loss of traditional food culture. The characters' preference for quick and convenient meals over traditional home-cooked meals highlights the shift towards a more globalized and homogenized food culture. The novel also comments on the role of food marketing and advertising in shaping people's food choices and influencing their perceptions of health and nutrition. Finally, food serves as a metaphor for the social hierarchies and power dynamics within India's caste system. The novel highlights the significance of food in the traditional arranged marriage system, where food plays a crucial role in impressing potential partners and their families. The descriptions of the elaborate feasts and banquets highlight the role of food as a marker of social status and wealth. The novel also explores the gendered nature of food roles in Indian society, where cooking and serving food is often seen as a woman's responsibility. Divakurni uses food as a powerful metaphor to portray the historical

aspects of India, including the impact of colonialism, migration, and globalization on Indian society and its food culture. By using food as a symbol of historical significance, the novel provides a multifaceted understanding of the complexities and contradictions of Indian society and its food culture. The significance of food in the novel also highlights its potential as a rich and versatile source of literary metaphor and symbolism, capable of exploring multiple layers of meaning and interpretation.

Through the descriptions of various recipes, ingredients, and cooking techniques, the novel highlights the impact of political institutions, policies, and ideologies on Indian society and the lives of the characters. The use of food as a political metaphor in the novel demonstrates its role as a symbol of power, resistance, and change. One of the most significant ways in which food serves as a political metaphor in *The Arranged Marriage* is through its association with power and control. Political institutions and leaders often use food as a means to exert their authority and influence over the masses. In the novel, the character of Indira Gandhi, the former Prime Minister of India in the 1980s, is referenced several times as a symbol of political power and ambition. The family's cook, Devi, refers to her as "the lady" and comments on how she changed the course of Indian politics. The descriptions of the elaborate feasts served at political meetings and events, such as the swanky dinner the family hosts for Sunil's boss, illustrate the opulence and extravagance

associated with political power. Furthermore, food serves as a metaphor for the impact of political policies on the lives of ordinary people. The novel is set against the backdrop of the Emergency, a period of political turmoil and repression in India in the 1970s. The characters' experiences with food during this time, such as the rationing of rice and sugar, the long lines for food supplies, and the scarcity of vegetables and fruits, highlight the impact of political decisions on the availability and distribution of food resources. The characters' reactions to these conditions, such as Anju's mother's resourcefulness in creating delicious but economical meals, show their ability to adapt and survive in difficult circumstances. Additionally, food serves as a metaphor for resistance against political oppression. Throughout the novel, several references are made to the role of food in protests and demonstrations against the government. The recipe for "Revolutionary Biryani," shared among the characters, is a nod to the political activism and resistance movements that emerged during the Emergency. The use of food as a political weapon, such as throwing tomatoes and eggs at politicians, reflects the frustration and anger of the masses towards the government's policies. Finally, food serves as a metaphor for cultural diversity and pluralism in India. The descriptions of the various regional cuisines, ingredients, and cooking techniques highlight the diversity of Indian culture and the influences of colonialism, migration, and globalization on Indian food. The characters' preferences for different types of food reflect their

cultural and regional identities, indicating the richness and complexity of Indian society. *The Arranged Marriage* employs food as a powerful metaphor to portray the political aspects of India, including power and control, the impact of political policies, resistance against political oppression, and cultural diversity. By using food as a symbol of political significance, the novel provides a nuanced understanding of the complexities and contradictions of Indian society and its politics. The significance of food in the novel also highlights its potential as a rich and versatile source of literary metaphor and symbolism, capable of exploring multiple layers of meaning and interpretation.

One of the most striking aspects of food in *The Arranged Marriage* is its association with gender roles and power dynamics. Traditionally, women in Indian households are expected to cook meals and serve them to the men in the family. In the novel, Anju's mother, who is a strong-willed and independent woman, challenges these patriarchal norms by using food as a way to assert her agency and control over her life. Through her cooking, she expresses her creativity, skill, and personality, defying the stereotype of a passive and submissive woman. The significance of food as a metaphor also extends to *The Arranged Marriage* system, which is a central theme of the novel. Anju's arranged marriage to Sunil is presented as a negotiation between families, much like the preparation of a dish that requires careful balance and proportion of ingredients. Both

families bring their own expectations, demands, and promises to the table, creating a complex and delicate web of relationships. The food served at the wedding ceremony, such as laddoos and rasgullas, represents the exchange of gifts and goodwill between families, signalling their acceptance and appreciation of each other. Moreover, food serves as a marker of cultural identity and tradition in the novel. The descriptions of Indian cuisine, such as biryani, samosas, and masala chai, provide a glimpse into the diverse regional and ethnic backgrounds of the characters. Through their food preferences and cooking methods, the characters reveal their cultural heritage, their relationship with their homeland, and their adaptation to new environments. For example, Anju's mother uses traditional Indian cooking techniques and spices to prepare dishes such as baingan bharta and chutneys, reflecting her loyalty to her cultural roots and her desire to pass down her traditions to the next generation. Finally, food is also a metaphor for the emotional and psychological states of the characters. The preparation and sharing of food represent the bonds of affection, intimacy, and communication between the characters, especially between Anju and her mother. The act of cooking and eating together becomes a form of therapy and reconciliation for the characters, helping them to heal the wounds of the past and build a new relationship. Similarly, the scarcity or abundance of food reflects the economic, social, and political conditions of the characters' lives, indicating their struggles, aspirations, and desires. By using food as a symbol

of social and cultural significance, the novel provides a nuanced understanding of the complexities and diversities of Indian society and its people. The significance of food in the novel also highlights its potential as a rich and versatile source of literary metaphor and symbolism, capable of exploring multiple layers of meaning and interpretation.

Divakurni explores the significance of food in exploring ethnic roots and cultural traditions. Through the descriptions of various recipes and food, the author presents a deeper understanding of the cultural heritage of the characters and their ethnic background. The use of food as a tool to explore the ethnic roots of the characters highlights the importance of cuisine, customs, and traditions in shaping an individual's identity. In *The Arranged Marriage*, food serves as a link between the past and present in the lives of the characters. The descriptions of Indian cuisine, including the names of dishes and cooking techniques, help readers understand the different ethnic groups and cultural traditions in India. For instance, the character of Anju's mother uses traditional Indian cooking methods and ingredients, such as turmeric, ginger, and cumin, to prepare dishes such as baingan bharta, chutneys, and laddoos. These dishes are reflective of the cultural and ethnic heritage of the family. By exploring food as a tool to explore ethnic roots, Divakurni provides insights into the different lifestyles and cultural practices of Indian people. Furthermore, food also serves as an instrument for

cultural preservation and adaptation. The characters in the novel use food to maintain their cultural traditions while adapting to new environments. For instance, Anju moves to the United States with her husband and begins incorporating new ingredients and flavours into her cooking, reflecting her evolving cultural identity and the changing dynamics of *The Arranged Marriage* system. Through her incorporation of new dishes, she reconciles with her identity and finds a sense of belonging in a foreign land. In addition, the novel also portrays the power dynamics that exist in Indian households through the preparation and serving of food. Women in traditional Indian households are typically responsible for cooking meals and serving them to the men in the family. This patriarchal tradition is challenged by the character of Anju's mother, who uses cooking as a way to assert her agency and control over her life. By exploring this aspect of Indian culture through food, Divakurni presents a nuanced understanding of the various social hierarchies and power dynamics that exist within Indian society. Through her descriptions of traditional Indian dishes, the author provides insights into the various lifestyles, customs, and traditions of Indian people. The use of food as a symbol of cultural preservation and adaptation highlights the dynamic nature of culture and its ability to adapt and transform over time. By examining the role of food in Indian society, the novel presents a complex and nuanced understanding of cultural identity, tradition, and change.

At its heart, *The Arranged Marriage* is a celebration of India's rich culinary heritage. Throughout the novel, Divakurni provides vivid descriptions of delicious and aromatic dishes that are unique to different regions of India. From Bengali specialties like Sandesh and Rasgulla to South Indian dishes like Idli and Dosai, food serves as a symbol for the rich cultural diversity of India. The novel also explores the ways in which different regions of India have distinct culinary traditions that reflect their unique history, geography, and cultural heritage. Moreover, food is also used as a tool to explore the complex web of social hierarchies and dynamics that exist within Indian society. The process of preparing food and eating is often deeply embedded in social and cultural practices. Women are traditionally the primary caretakers of the kitchen in Indian households, and their role in preparing food frequently serves as a way to assert their control and power over the household. Through the character of Anju's mother, Divakurni shows how women use the kitchen as a space to challenge gender norms and assert their agency. Religious and cultural practices are also closely tied to the preparation and consumption of food in India. The novel explores the rituals and traditions that surround food and their significance in religious ceremonies and social occasions. For example, the Kumari Puja statue is intricately linked to the practice of prasad preparation, highlighting the importance of food in religious ceremonies. Food is also used as a symbol to explore how cultural identity is both preserved and adapted in the face of changing circumstances. The

novel portrays characters adapting to new cultural contexts and incorporating new ingredients and flavours into their cooking. For instance, when Anju moves to the United States, she begins to incorporate new ingredients and flavours into her cooking, reflecting her evolving cultural identity and the changing dynamics of the Arranged Marriage system. Overall, *The Arranged Marriage* is a powerful exploration of how food can serve as a tool to explore cultural diversity and identity in India. Through the use of rich descriptions of traditional dishes and the complex social hierarchies and cultural practices that surround food, Divakurni offers a deep and nuanced look into the complexities of Indian society and the efforts to maintain and adapt cultural traditions as they encounter modernity.

One of the primary ways in which food is used to explore Indian identity in *The Arranged Marriage* is to depict the rich cultural heritage of India. Divakurni uses food as a metaphor to represent the diverse cultural traditions and values of different regions of India. The novel features several traditional dishes and cooking techniques that are unique to particular regions in India. For instance, the author describes the preparation of Bengali cuisine, which is known for its distinct flavours and use of local ingredients. The mention of regional specific food, such as Sandesh or Puchkas, provides a sense of the distinctiveness of regional identity in India. Furthermore, food is also used to explore the gender roles and the

dynamics of power in Indian society. In *The Arranged Marriage*, food preparation is mostly the domain of women, and it serves as a means to assert their control and power over the household. Women, especially mothers, are responsible for managing the kitchen and preparing meals that reflect their values and beliefs. For instance, Anju's mother is an excellent cook and takes pride in serving traditional Bengali cuisine. She uses food as a tool to challenge gender norms and assert her authority within the household. In contrast, Anju's mother-in-law is depicted as a traditionalist who seeks to enforce gender roles and emphasizes the importance of cooking in maintaining the family's honour and reputation. Moreover, food is also used as a symbol to represent the complexities of Indian society. The process of preparing meals in the novel reflects the contours of Indian society and the different social hierarchies that exist within it. For instance, the household hierarchy is defined by the roles and responsibilities of different family members related to food and its preparation. The preparation and consumption of food are linked to religious and social rituals that are an essential part of Indian culture. For example, the story of the Kumari Puja statue is intricately woven around the significance of the prasada preparation for the deity, thus highlighting the importance of food in religious ceremonies. Finally, food is used as a lens to explore the changing attitudes and beliefs of the characters in the novel. The novel portrays characters adapting to new cultural contexts and changing their traditional practices and beliefs. For

instance, Anju adapts to her new life in the United States and incorporates new flavours and ingredients into her cooking. In doing so, she incorporates new cultural influences and identities from her surroundings. Through food, Divakurni provides an insight into the rich and diverse cultural heritage in India, the gender roles and social hierarchies that define society, the significance of food in religious and social rituals, and the evolution of cultural attitudes and beliefs. The use of food in this novel serves as an effective tool to portray the complexity of Indian identity and the effort that goes into preserving and adapting culture to fit different contexts.

The novel explores the complexities of Indian culture through various themes, including family dynamics, gender roles, and marriage. Food is used as a symbol throughout the novel to depict the customs and traditions that reflect Indian cultural values. One of the primary cultural values emphasized in the novel is the importance of hospitality. Food is seen as a way of expressing hospitality and welcoming guests into one's home. Anju's mother is a skilled cook who uses food to make guests feel comfortable and at home. This is evident when Anju's mother cooks a traditional Bengali meal for her guests, showcasing the rich cultural heritage of the Bengali people. In addition, Anju's in-laws are shown to be hospitable through their insistence on serving food to their guests and making sure they are well-fed. The novel also portrays food as a way of preserving cultural traditions and passing them down from

one generation to another. Anju's mother teaches her daughter traditional dishes and the art of cooking. The preparation of various dishes is shown to be a labour of love, involving careful selection of ingredients, precise measurements, and skilled cooking techniques. The novel demonstrates that these traditional recipes and techniques have been passed down for generations, highlighting the importance of cultural preservation. Moreover, the novel explores the gender roles associated with food and the kitchen in Indian culture. Food preparation is traditionally viewed as a woman's responsibility in Indian households. Anju and her mother-in-law have a contentious relationship because they have different opinions on how the kitchen and food preparation should be handled. Anju strives to assert her independence by cooking her own food, while her mother-in-law believes that the kitchen is her domain. This conflict represents the larger societal struggle for gender equality in India. Another significant cultural value highlighted in the novel is the importance of food as a ritualistic practice. The preparation and consumption of food are intertwined with numerous religious and social rituals in Indian society. The novel depicts the preparation of traditional sweets like Laddoos for religious rituals, which are essential to Indian festivals and celebrations. This emphasis on traditional practices reinforces the idea that food is an essential aspect of Indian cultural values. Furthermore, the novel showcases the diversity of Indian cuisine and the cultural values associated with regional food traditions. The novel emphasizes the cuisine of Bengal, depicting

the region's unique food traditions. The novel also references other regional cuisines and highlights their cultural significance in Indian society. This portrayal of the diversity of Indian cuisine reflects the larger idea of cultural unity, despite the differences in regional traditions. The novel emphasizes the importance of hospitality and cultural preservation, the role of food in maintaining gender roles, the significance of food as a ritualistic practice, and the diversity of Indian cuisine. Through its portrayal of food, the novel paints a rich and authentic picture of Indian culture that celebrates the customs and traditions that define this vibrant society.

Food plays a significant role in representing cultural values in *The Arranged Marriage*. The novel explores the complexities of Indian culture through various themes, including marriage, family dynamics, and gender roles. Food is used as a motif throughout the novel to depict customs and traditions that reflect Indian cultural values. One of the significant cultural values emphasized in the novel is the importance of hospitality. Food is seen as a way of expressing hospitality and welcoming guests into one's home. Anju's mother is an excellent cook who uses food as a way to make guests feel comfortable and at home. This is evident when Anju's mother cooks a traditional Bengali meal for her guests, showcasing the rich cultural heritage of the Bengali people. In addition, Anju's in-laws are shown to be hospitable through their insistence on serving food to their guests and making sure they are well-fed. The novel also

portrays food as a way of preserving cultural traditions and passing them down from one generation to another. Anju's mother teaches her daughter the art of cooking and the importance of traditional dishes. The preparation of various dishes is shown to be a labour of love, involving careful selection of ingredients, precise measurements, and skilled cooking techniques. The novel demonstrates that these traditional recipes and techniques have been passed down for generations, highlighting the importance of cultural preservation. Moreover, the novel explores the gender roles associated with food and the kitchen in the Indian culture. In Indian households, food preparation is traditionally viewed as a woman's responsibility. Anju and her mother-in-law have a contentious relationship because they have different opinions on how the kitchen and food preparation should be handled. Anju feels that her mother-in-law is controlling, and she wants to assert her independence by cooking her own food. This conflict represents the larger societal struggle for gender equality in India. Another significant cultural value highlighted in the novel is the importance of food as a ritualistic practice. The preparation and consumption of food are intertwined with numerous religious and social rituals in Indian society. The novel depicts the preparation of traditional sweets like Laddoos for religious rituals, which are essential to Indian festivals and celebrations. This emphasis on traditional practices reinforces the idea that food is an essential aspect of Indian cultural values. Furthermore, the novel showcases the diversity of Indian cuisine and

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Divakurni explores the nuances of Indian culture, and food is a significant motif that runs throughout the novel. The novel presents an authentic portrayal of the relationship between food and Indian culture. Through the exploration of food's various aspects, the novel depicts the complexity of Indian culture around food. The novel portrays food as an integral part of Indian culture. Food is presented as the binding force that connects individuals and families, and it shapes interpersonal relationships in the Indian community. Anju, the protagonist of the novel, often reflects on her relationship with food and how it connects her with her cultural roots. Through Anju's musings, the novel establishes that food is more than sustenance and that it carries cultural significance that must be preserved. *The*

Arranged Marriage also highlights food as a ritualistic practice in Indian culture. Many rituals, both religious and social, revolve around food. For instance, the Diwali festival, which is a significant festival in the Indian calendar, involves the preparation of various sweets and other food items. The novel emphasizes the preparation of ritualistic food items, such as Laddoos, which are traditional sweets used in celebratory occasions, to signify the significance of food in Indian rituals. Furthermore, the novel discusses the role of food in gender identity and the power struggle between men and women within the Indian community. Indian culture often assigns specific roles to men and women regarding food preparation and consumption. The novel highlights this in the portrayal of the power dynamic in Anju and her mother-in-law's relationship. Anju resents her mother-in-law's authoritative control over the kitchen, which is the traditional domain of women in Indian households. This struggle reflects the larger societal struggle for gender equality in Indian culture. Additionally, the portrayal of different types of food in the novel reflects the diversity that is present in Indian cuisine and culture. Indian cuisine is diverse, reflecting the different regions and cultures in India. In *The Arranged Marriage*, the novel presents different dishes specific to certain regions in India, which creates a robust characterisation of the Indian culture around food. In conclusion, *The Arranged Marriage* uses food as a symbol to represent Indian culture. The novel employs food as a motif to explore the complexity of Indian culture, presenting it as an essential

aspect of life and human existence. The novel emphasizes the role of food in connecting individuals and communities, shaping gender identity, and reflecting cultural diversity. Thus, the novel underscores the importance of food in representing Indian culture in *The Arranged Marriage*.

CHAPTER- 4

**COOKING UP CULTURE: AN EXPLORATION OF
FOOD IN *MISTRESS OF SPICES***

The portrayal of food is a significant aspect of Indian culture and is often used to represent the country abroad. In *Mistress of Spices*, food plays a pivotal role in portraying Indian culture in the diaspora. The novel represents contemporary Indian writing in English and explores the relationship between food and culture while acknowledging the diaspora experience of being caught between two worlds. *Mistress of Spices* is a novel about Tilo, an Indian woman who is sent to America as a *Mistress of Spices*, an ancient order of women who have magical powers and help people in need. Tilo uses her knowledge of spices to help her clients and ultimately learns about herself in the process. The novel's plot is centred around an Indian grocery store where Tilo has a space full of exotic spices that are used for specific ailments, each spice having special powers. Tilo's magical powers are integral to the novel, but her trade is also a metaphor for the importance of Indian spices in representing the country's culture. In the novel, food is used to represent the culture of India. The spices that Tilo keeps in her shop are not only used to help her clients, but they are a representation of the diversity and richness of India's food culture. Each spice has a unique story and is tied to a particular region, recipe, or custom in India. For example,

turmeric is associated with Indian wedding ceremonies, while cardamom is used in cures for digestive problems and is commonly used in chai tea. Through the portrayal of these spices, the author celebrates India's culinary traditions and reinforces the idea that food is a critically important aspect of the country's culture. Moreover, the novel exemplifies contemporary Indian writing in English. Indian writing in English is a vast genre that encompasses a diverse range of experiences and voices. It explores the diverse cultures and perspectives of India and represents the diaspora experience across the globe. *Mistress of Spices* is a fascinating example of how contemporary Indian writing in English can portray the diaspora experience through food. Through the spices and the food that Tilo serves, Divakurni celebrates the diaspora's diversity and acknowledges the challenges of living between two cultures. Furthermore, food also serves as a significant factor in bridging the gap between different cultures and traditions. Tilo's store attracts people from different cultural backgrounds, and she uses her knowledge of spices to connect with them emotionally. The use of food as a tool for connection and healing represents the universality of food and its ability to bring people together. The novel promotes the idea that food has an essential role to play in fostering social and cultural understanding and highlights its potential to bring different communities in society closer to one another. Divakurni demonstrates the significance of food in representing Indian culture in contemporary Indian writing in English. By displaying the varied

spices and culinary traditions of India, the novel celebrates the country's rich cultural heritage and reinforces the belief that food plays a crucial role in preserving cultural identity. Moreover, the novel uses food as a bridge that connects different cultures, thereby emphasizing its potential for social and cultural cohesion. Divakurni powerfully depicts the relationship between food and culture in the novel and highlights the importance of embracing it.

Mistress of Spices explores the powerful role of food in bridging the cultural divide faced by the diaspora. The story is set in an Indian grocery store in America where the protagonist Tilo, the *Mistress of Spices*, uses her magical powers to connect with the customers who visit her store and help them overcome the cultural and social barriers they face. Throughout the novel, the author uses food as a symbol of bridge, highlighting how it serves as an essential tool for the diaspora community in preserving their cultural identity and making connections with their roots. One of the key ways in which the author portrays food as a symbol of bridge is through the use of traditional recipes and spices. The novel's characters use food as a way to express their cultural identity and maintain a connection with their cultural heritage. For instance, Tilo uses traditional Indian spices and cooking methods to prepare dishes that reflect her cultural identity. Through her cooking, she creates a bridge between different cultures and communities, sharing the flavours and aromas of her homeland with the diaspora community. Divakurni's portrayal

of food as a symbol of bridge highlights the importance of preserving cultural traditions and the connections they create between people from different backgrounds. Moreover, the author uses food to explore the hybrid cultural identity of the diaspora community. The novel portrays how the diaspora community combines techniques and ingredients from their homeland with those of their adopted country. The characters in the novel create new forms of cuisine that represent a blend of different cultural traditions. Through this blending of cultural influences, the diaspora community shows the world that they are more than the sum of their parts. Food plays a crucial role in this process of cultural fusion, as it allows people to explore and experiment with new culinary experiences. Furthermore, Divakurni's novel highlights how food can be used as a tool for connection and healing. The novel's protagonist, Tilo, uses her knowledge of spices to connect with her customers on a deep and emotional level. Through her carefully curated spices, Tilo helps her customers overcome the challenges they face in their daily lives. Her spices become a gateway to a better understanding of oneself and one's cultural identity. Through the act of cooking and sharing food, people are brought together, and connection and healing are facilitated. Finally, Divakurni's novel underscores the importance of preserving cultural identity and traditions. Through the use of traditional spices and recipes, the diaspora community can maintain a connection with their cultural heritage. Food serves as a symbol of continuity, connecting the

present generation with the traditions of the past. Moreover, the novel shows how members of the diaspora community who lose their connection with their cultural roots often experience a sense of loss and disconnection. Food, therefore, serves as a powerful symbol of bridge for the diaspora community in their journey towards reclaiming their cultural identity, their roots, and their place in society. Through the use of traditional recipes and spices, food serves as a tool for preserving cultural traditions and forging connections between different cultural communities. Additionally, food helps in the process of creating a shared cultural identity that is a fusion of different cultures and traditions. Overall, Divakurni's portrayal of food as a symbol of bridge showcases the profound significance of food in the lives of the diaspora community.

Divakurni explores the significance of food as a symbol of national identity. The novel's protagonist, Tilo, is the *Mistress of Spices* who uses her extraordinary powers to connect with the people who visit her store and help them with their problems. The story is set in an Indian grocery store in America, where Tilo uses her knowledge of spices to help her customers and retain their cultural heritage. The novel explores the deep-rooted connection between food and national identity, highlighting how the use of traditional spices and cooking methods are closely linked to cultural identity and pride. One of the significant ways in which the author portrays food as a symbol of national identity is through the use of spices.

Tilo has an intimate relationship with spices and herbs that she uses to heal her customers. She prepares special blends of spices, which she calls 'mixtures' that are unique to her customers' needs and ethnicity. Divakurni paints a vivid picture of the diverse mixtures, each with its distinctive flavor, aroma, and healing properties. The spices become a powerful symbol of the cultural heritage and identity of the people who visit Tilo's store. The author also uses food to show how it is inextricably linked to national identity and culture. The novel's characters use food as a way to express their cultural identity and connect with their heritage. For instance, each time Tilo cooks, she uses traditional recipes and spices that are in line with the Indian culinary traditions. The novel portrays how food is a bridge that connects immigrants living in a foreign land to their cultural heritage and identity. Through the use of traditional spices and cooking methods, Tilo helps immigrants retain their cultural identity and pride in their national heritage. Furthermore, the author utilizes food to show how its significance goes beyond sustenance and nourishment. Food is a way to express and preserve cultural identity, values, and practices. Divakurni highlights that traditional spices and recipes have been passed down through generations and play a significant role in shaping national identity. The novel shows how the loss of traditional spices and cooking methods can result in an erosion of cultural identity and pride in national heritage. The characters' relationship with food becomes an essential aspect of their national identity and culture. Finally, the author portrays how

food is a manifestation of the hybrid, transcultural identity of immigrants. The novel's characters mix spices and cooking methods from different traditions. Through this, the characters create new hybrid cuisines that blend different culinary traditions. The novel thus shows how immigration helps create new cultures and identities that emerge from cross-cultural interactions. In this way, food becomes an essential symbol of the transcultural identity of immigrants living in a foreign land. Through the use of spices and cooking methods, the author highlights the deep-rooted connection between food and culture. The novel portrays how food is not just for sustenance but an essential aspect of national identity and pride. Food becomes a way to preserve cultural heritage and connect with one's cultural roots. As such, food serves as a powerful manifestation of the hybrid, transcultural identity of immigrants living in a foreign land. Overall, *Mistress of Spices* underscores the profound significance of food in shaping national identity and cultural heritage.

Mistress of Spices explores the cultural and social norms prevalent in Indian society, including patriarchal norms. One of the significant ways in which the author portrays patriarchal norms is through the use of food as a symbol. Through the rich and evocative language, Divakurni highlights the gendered expectations around food, which reflect larger patriarchal attitudes that shape social dynamics and relationships in Indian society. Food serves as a

symbol of patriarchal norms in Indian society. As the novel is set in an Indian grocery store in America, the story provides a glimpse into the lives of immigrants who are trying to hold on to their cultural heritage. Tilo, the *Mistress of Spices*, witnesses first-hand the gendered expectations that surround food. She comes to understand how food is not just a source of nourishment but a means of enforcing gender norms. In *Mistress of Spices*, food becomes a symbol of the patriarchal expectations that shape social relationships and expectations. One way in which food symbolizes patriarchal norms is through the division of labour in the kitchen. In traditional Indian households, women are expected to be the primary caregivers and are responsible for cooking, cleaning, and taking care of the household. In the novel, Tilo observes how women are expected to cook meals and serve them to their families, while men are not expected to engage in any household chores. This division of labour reinforces patriarchal norms where women are viewed as the primary caregivers and men as the breadwinners. Food, therefore, becomes a symbol of the gendered expectations that shape daily life in Indian households and society. Another way in which food symbolizes patriarchal norms is through the expectations around marriage and motherhood. In Indian society, women are expected to marry and have children, and these are seen as the primary objectives of their lives. Tilo observes how women are expected to cook a variety of dishes to impress their husbands or in-laws. She also observes how women are judged based on their ability to bear

children. Food, in this sense, symbolizes the patriarchal expectations that women face in Indian society. Finally, food also becomes a symbol of the gendered power dynamics in Indian households. In Indian society, men are expected to be in control of the household and to make decisions regarding food, finances, and other aspects of daily life. Tilo observes how women are expected to serve food to men first and how they are not allowed to eat until everyone else has finished. This unequal power dynamic is further reinforced by the expectation that women be subservient and acquiescent. Food, in this sense, becomes a symbol of the gendered power dynamics that shape social relationships and expectations in Indian households and society. Through her masterful use of food imagery, Divakurni highlights the gendered expectations that surround food and how they reflect larger patriarchal attitudes. The novel's portrayal of food as a symbol shows how it represents the unequal division of labour, the expectations around marriage and motherhood, and the gendered power dynamics in Indian society. Food, therefore, becomes an essential and insightful lens through which Divakurni examines the patriarchal norms that shape social relationships and expectations in Indian society.

The novel not only explores the religious heritage of India but also sheds light on the economic aspects of the country. One of the significant ways in which the author portrays the economic conditions of India is through the use of food as a metaphor. Through

her poignant use of food imagery, Divakurni reflects the economic disparity prevalent in India and the struggle that people face in their daily lives. Food serves as a metaphor for the economic conditions prevalent in India. As the novel is set in an Indian grocery store in America, the story provides a glimpse into the lives of immigrants who face economic challenges in their daily life. Tilo, the *Mistress of Spices*, uses her knowledge of spices to help these immigrants cope with their daily struggles. She also recognizes the economic challenges they face and the role that food plays in their lives. In *Mistress of Spices*, food becomes a metaphor for the economic struggles and challenges that people face in India, as well as among the diaspora in America. One of the ways in which food serves as a metaphor for the economic conditions of India is through the use of prices. Divakurni uses the price of spices as a metaphor to depict the economic conditions of the country. Expensive spices such as saffron and cardamom represent the elite and wealthy classes, while cheap spices such as cumin and turmeric symbolize the poor. Divakurni highlights the importance of prices and their role in shaping the economic conditions of the country. The high prices of certain spices and the inaccessibility of some to the poor are reflective of the income inequality prevalent in India. Food also serves as a metaphor for the cyclical nature of poverty in India. The story depicts how poverty is often passed down from generation to generation and how it becomes a never-ending cycle. Tilo's customers, who are struggling to make ends meet, are forced to

choose cheap and less nutritious food. This leads to poor health, which then results in unemployment or underemployment, leading to continued impoverishment. Divakurni uses food as a metaphor to emphasize the cyclical nature of poverty in India. Finally, food also becomes a metaphor for the power dynamics in Indian society. Throughout the novel, Tilo struggles to maintain her independence and autonomy in the face of social and economic pressures. Her customers, despite seeking refuge in her store for the spices and advice, never truly respect her position and authority. In this sense, the customers' relationship with Tilo is a metaphor for the exploitation of the lower classes by the middle and upper classes in India. The use of food as a metaphor highlights the power dynamics and inequality prevalent in Indian society. Through her masterful use of spices and their value, Divakurni's imagery reflects the economic struggles, cyclical poverty, and power dynamics in Indian society. The novel's portrayal of food as a metaphor shows how it represents the economic conditions and the social hierarchy prevalent in India. The novel highlights the fact that food is not just a means of sustenance but is also tied to the economic and social conditions of society. Divakurni's use of food as a metaphor is both insightful and profound, providing a unique and vivid depiction of the economic conditions of India.

As India is a country with many different religions and customs, food is an integral part of the country's religious practices and

beliefs. Through her masterful use of food as a symbol, Divakurni portrays the religious aspects of India and the role that food plays in shaping spiritual beliefs. One way in which food serves as a metaphor for India's religious beliefs is through its use in religious rituals and ceremonies. In *Mistress of Spices*, Tilo, the novel's protagonist, is an immortal who uses her knowledge of spices to help people overcome their problems. Tilo's use of spices and the spiritual significance of each spice is a metaphor for the role that food plays in religious rituals and ceremonies. For example, turmeric, a spice commonly used in Indian cuisine, is used to purify the body and soul in Hinduism. Divakurni's use of spices as a metaphor highlights how food is an essential element in religious practices and beliefs. Food also serves as a metaphor for the connection between the physical and spiritual world in India's religious traditions. In Hinduism, food is seen as a means of achieving union with the divine. The act of cooking and preparing food is considered a sacred act, and the food itself is thought to have spiritual properties. In *Mistress of Spices*, Tilo's control over spices and her ability to use them to heal people is a metaphor for the power of food to connect people with the divine. Tilo's work as a *Mistress of Spices* is a reminder of the sacredness of food and its role in bringing individuals closer to their spiritual selves. Another way in which food serves as a metaphor is through its connection with Karma and the notions of purity and impurity in Indian religious beliefs. Food is often used as a metaphor for the actions and deeds

of the individual, with good actions leading to purity and impure actions leading to impurity. In *Mistress of Spices*, Tilo's use of spices to heal and help people overcome their problems is a metaphor for the power of good deeds to transform people's lives. The spices themselves are symbolic of the different actions people take and their effects on individuals' Karma. Finally, food serves as a metaphor for the diversity of religious beliefs and customs in India. India is a country with many different religions and customs, each with its unique food traditions and practices. In *Mistress of Spices*, Divakurni depicts the diversity of food traditions and practices across different religious groups in India. Tilo's ability to connect with spices and use them to help people from different religious backgrounds is emblematic of the universal nature of food and its ability to unite people from different religious and cultural backgrounds. The novel's use of spices and their spiritual significance is a reminder of the central role that food plays in Indian religious traditions. Food serves as a metaphor for the connection between the physical and spiritual world and the power of good deeds to transform people's lives. Moreover, food represents the diversity of religious traditions and practices in India, highlighting its multicultural and multi-religious identity. Divakurni's use of food as a symbol is both evocative and profound, highlighting the importance of food in shaping India's spiritual and cultural beliefs.

In this novel, food represents not only the sustenance and nourishment provided by it but also the historical and cultural significance associated with it. Through evocative descriptions of spices and their traditional uses, Divakurni creates a picture of India's past and present that is both vivid and layered. Food is an essential aspect of Indian culture and history, with the country being known for its diverse cuisine and unique spices. Divakurni masterfully employs her knowledge of Indian cuisine to create a rich and vibrant narrative, bringing to life the flavours and aromas of Indian cooking. In *Mistress of Spices*, Tilo, the novel's protagonist, is an immortal who can connect with spices and use them to heal and influence others. Tilo's control of the spice trade and her supernatural abilities are metaphors for the role that food has played in shaping India's history. One way that food serves as a metaphor in the novel is through its relationship with cultural identity. India is a diverse country with numerous religious, linguistic, and cultural groups. Food, as a fundamental aspect of culture, is an essential ingredient in the construction of identity. In *Mistress of Spices*, Tilo's use of spices to evoke memories and connect with her clients' cultural histories demonstrates their significance in shaping individual and collective identities. For example, Tilo uses turmeric, a spice commonly used in Indian cuisine, to transport her clients to their cultural roots. Divakurni's use of food as a metaphor highlights the importance of cultural heritage in shaping national identity. Another way in which food serves as a metaphor is through its

connection with power and oppression. In India's history, the control of food and its production has always been a source of power. The British, who colonized India for several hundred years, exploited the country's resources, including its spices. *Mistress of Spices* portrays the exploitation of India's spices, highlighting how the spice trade was used to oppress and control the country's people. Tilo's fight against the corrupt system is a metaphor for India's independence movement. Divakurni also uses food as a metaphor to depict gender roles and the struggles faced by women in Indian society. Women have always played a crucial role in Indian cooking, with cooking and serving food frequently being associated with female roles. In *Mistress of Spices*, Tilo's role as a powerful, immortal *Mistress of Spices* is a metaphor for women's empowerment in Indian society. Tilo is a trailblazer who forges new paths and challenges traditional gender roles. Food is also a metaphor for the connection between humans and nature. India's agricultural heritage is inextricably linked to its food culture, with farmers cultivating crops such as rice, spices, and vegetables. In *Mistress of Spices*, Tilo's supernatural powers are symbolic of the relationship between nature and humans. Her ability to connect with spices and use them to heal and provide nourishment is a metaphor for the connection between humans and the natural world. The novel is replete with vivid descriptions of traditional spices and their uses, providing a comprehensive account of the integral role that food plays in Indian culture. Food serves as a metaphor for various aspects of Indian society, including religious

and cultural identity, power and oppression, gender roles, and the relationship between humans and nature. Through her distinct characterization of spices and the protagonist's supernatural powers, Divakurni crafts an evocative and deeply symbolic narrative that celebrates India's rich and diverse culinary heritage.

The novel explores themes of power, corruption, and the struggle for social justice through the powerful metaphor of food. Through the rich language of spices and the characters' connections to food, Divakurni crafts a narrative of political struggle that is uniquely tied to the traditional foods of India. Food is a powerful tool for political control, as it can be used to create wealth and power for those who control the means of production and distribution. In the novel, the spices that Tilo controls and sells at her spice shop are deeply connected to political power. Tilo has the supernatural ability to connect with the spices she sells, using them to influence the emotions and actions of those who consume them. She uses this power to help people, but also to manipulate those who threaten her business or her community. Her ability to control the spice trade gives her a measure of power over her community and allows her to both support and challenge the status quo. The spice trade is also deeply connected to corruption and exploitation in India, particularly as it relates to the British colonial era. Throughout the novel, the spice trade is portrayed as a tool for colonialists to exploit and plunder the resources of Indian communities. The British, who

controlled India for much of the 19th and early 20th centuries, relied heavily on the cultivation and export of Indian spices to build their empire. Divakurni uses Tilo's experiences in the spices trade, both in India and in Oakland, to explore the dark side of this industry, revealing how it can be used to exploit and dehumanize the people who produce the spices. Food is also used to symbolize resistance to political oppression and to highlight the struggles for social justice in India. Tilo, as an immortal *Mistress of Spices*, is deeply connected to the history of Indian cuisine and its role in the country's cultural identity. She uses spices to heal people, inspire them to fight for change, and to connect them to their past. Through her rituals of preparing food and spices, she highlights the importance of cultural traditions as a way to resist corrupt political power. Moreover, the novel highlights the importance of self-sufficiency and community empowerment as means of challenging political oppression. Tilo creates a community of individuals who depend on her for spices, but who also support each other in a deep and meaningful way. By creating this community, Tilo models a different kind of power dynamic than the exploitative ones that characterize the broader spice industry. The community's dependence on each other and their shared commitment to social justice allow them to fight for change in a meaningful and effective way. *Mistress of Spices* uses food as a powerful and multifaceted metaphor to explore the political aspects of Indian society. Tilo's control of the spice trade, her ability to manipulate using spices, and her connection to the history of Indian

cuisine all highlight the ways in which food can be tied to political power. Additionally, the novel sheds light on the corrupt and exploitative practices that often drive the spice industry. Ultimately, however, the novel also shows how food can be a powerful tool for resistance and social justice. Through community-building, self-sufficiency, and cultural traditions, Tilo models a vision of political power that is cooperative, sustainable, and grounded in compassion.

Food, in the novel, is portrayed as a symbol of tradition and culture. Divakurni uses food to explore the traditional gender roles of women in India. Tilo learns to cook at a young age and her skills in cooking are her gateway to becoming a powerful and influential *Mistress of Spices*. At the same time, Tilo's aunt is confined to the kitchen as she is forced to cook and serve food to her male relatives. The aunt's restrictions in the kitchen symbolize the traditionally prescribed roles of Indian women within the domestic sphere. Moreover, food serves as a metaphor for the caste system in India. Tilo belongs to a higher caste that is associated with knowledge, learning, and spirituality. She draws upon this knowledge to heal and inspire those around her, reflecting the social responsibility expected of individuals belonging to her caste. In contrast, the lower castes in the novel are associated with physical labour and menial tasks such as cooking and cleaning. Tilo, however, acknowledges that there are valuable lessons to be learned from the lower castes, such as the wisdom of the humble and the importance of practical skills.

Immigration is another social issue highlighted through the use of food in the novel. Tilo's customers in her spice shop come from diverse backgrounds and use her spices to connect with their cultural heritage. In this way, the novel reflects the experiences of many immigrants who use food to maintain a connection with their homeland. The use of spices also highlights how culture can be preserved and passed on through generations. Despite the distance between the customers and their home country, Tilo uses food to help them maintain a connection to India. Furthermore, food serves as a symbol of identity and self-discovery in the novel. Tilo helps her customers connect with their cultural roots by creating personalized spice blends for them. By using food to explore their ethnic identity, Tilo's customers are able to gain a sense of belonging and self-discovery. In this way, the novel explores how food can be used to address issues of identity and belonging. Through the use of food, Divakurni sheds light on the traditional roles of women in India, the caste system, immigration, and the power of food to connect with one's cultural heritage. In doing so, the novel highlights the importance of food as a powerful tool for exploring and understanding cultural identity and social issues.

Mistress of Spices is a masterpiece that portrays the power of food to explore one's ethnic roots through sensory experiences. The novel revolves around the life of Tilo, an immortal *Mistress of Spices* who runs a spice shop in Oakland, California. Tilo uses the power

of spices to influence the lives of her customers, and through her work as a Mistress of Spices, the novel underscores the significance of food in exploring one's ethnic roots. The novel depicts how food serves as a window to one's cultural heritage and background. Tilo uses her knowledge of the history and cultural significance of different spices to create personalized spice blends for her customers. For example, she uses turmeric to connect with her Indian customers, as it is a spice commonly used in Indian cuisine. Similarly, she uses ginger to connect with her Chinese customers, as it is a popular spice used in Chinese cuisine. Through her work, Tilo highlights how spices have been at the centre of cultural exchange and influenced cuisines from all over the world. Furthermore, the novel emphasizes the sensory experiences involved in exploring one's ethnic roots through food. Tilo helps her customers connect with their cultural heritage by creating spice blends that evoke memories of their homeland. For instance, she uses cumin, coriander, and cardamom to help a Pakistani customer reconnect with her roots and feel closer to her homeland. Tilo helps her customers explore their ethnic identity through the use of spices that help them reconnect with their cultural history. In addition, the novel highlights the role of food in building intercultural relationships and promoting tolerance. Tilo's work as a *Mistress of Spices* involves catering to customers from different ethnic backgrounds, and she uses food to bridge cultural gaps and build connections. She shows her customers how spices can be used in different cuisines and how

they can be blended together to create new flavours. In doing so, she helps promote cultural exchange and understanding, breaking down cultural barriers and creating a sense of community. Moreover, the novel emphasizes the transformative power of food in healing emotional wounds. Tilo uses spices to help her customers deal with emotional pain and traumas. For example, she gives cinnamon to a customer struggling with loneliness and isolation, as it is believed to have warming and comforting properties. Through spices, Tilo helps her customers heal and experience a sense of belonging and connection to their cultural heritage. Through her work as a Mistress of Spices, Tilo shows how food is not just a source of sustenance but also a vehicle for exploring cultural diversity and understanding. In doing so, the novel underscores the transformative power of food in promoting cultural exchange, breaking down barriers, and building lasting connections.

One way in which food is used to explore cultural diversity in *Mistress of Spices* is through its depiction of the varieties of cuisine associated with different ethnic and cultural groups. The novel highlights the diversity of Indian cuisine by exploring the different flavours, textures, and aromas associated with various regions around the country. Through Tilo's work with spices, we see how ingredients can be blended together to create new flavours and textures, each with their own unique cultural history and significance. In addition to emphasizing the diversity of Indian

cuisine, the novel also depicts food as a means through which individuals from different cultures can connect and understand one another. Through Tilo's interactions with her customers, we see how food can serve as a bridge between cultures, allowing people to share their experiences and connect through a common love of food. Tilo uses her knowledge of spices and culinary traditions to create personalized mixes for each customer, which allows her to connect with them on a deeper level and understand their cultural background and preferences. Moreover, the novel highlights the power of food to transcend cultural boundaries and challenge societal norms. Through her work as a *Mistress of Spices*, Tilo is able to challenge gender stereotypes and expectations. As a woman in a male-dominated profession, Tilo is able to use her mastery of spices to assert her authority and challenge gender roles within the Indian community. Her success as a *Mistress of Spices* shows that women can excel in traditionally male-dominated fields and contribute to the promotion of cultural diversity. Finally, the novel suggests that food can be a tool for preserving cultural traditions and promoting cultural exchange. Tilo's work as a *Mistress of Spices* involves not only introducing new spices and blends to her customers, but also preserving traditional recipes and culinary techniques. She emphasizes the importance of respecting cultural heritage and passing down culinary traditions to future generations. Tilo's work also promotes cultural exchange, as she introduces her customers to new cuisines and spice blends from around the world.

Through its portrayal of spices, cuisine, and culinary traditions, the novel emphasizes the diversity of Indian culture and promotes cultural exchange. The novel highlights the transformative power of food to bring people together and challenge societal norms, showcasing the important role that food can play in promoting cultural diversity and understanding.

One way in which food is used to explore Indian identity in the novel is through its connection to tradition and heritage. Indian cuisine is known for its rich flavours and regional variations, and the novel highlights the importance of preserving these culinary traditions. Tilo's work as a Mistress of Spices is deeply rooted in her knowledge and respect for the traditions and techniques of her craft, which has been passed down through generations. The spices and food she creates allow her to connect with her cultural identity and preserve the traditions of her homeland while also adapting to the new environment she finds herself in. Another way in which food is used to explore Indian identity in the novel is through its connection to spiritual and emotional well-being. Tilo's work with spices is shown to have a profound impact on the emotional and spiritual lives of her customers. Her spices can heal wounds and illnesses through both their medicinal and physical properties, and the food she creates can evoke powerful emotional responses. This emphasis on the healing powers of food and spices reflects the deep connection between food and Indian cultural identity, as food and

spices are often used in traditional Indian medical practices and spiritual ceremonies. Furthermore, food is used to explore the diversity and complexity of Indian identity in the novel. Tilo's work with spices allows her to blend different regional traditions and create unique flavours for each of her customers. Her customers come from a variety of cultural backgrounds, and the spices and foods she creates are a reflection of the diversity that exists within India. Through food, the novel portrays the multifaceted nature of Indian identity and the importance of embracing diversity. Additionally, food is used to explore the ways in which gender roles and identity are constructed and challenged within Indian culture. Tilo, as a young woman, challenges traditional gender roles and expectations by becoming a Mistress of Spices. She is able to use her knowledge and intelligence to thrive in a profession that is traditionally male-dominated. Through her work with spices and food, Tilo challenges stereotypes and constructs a new identity for herself that is rooted in her cultural traditions. Through its connections to tradition, healing, diversity, and gender roles, food is shown to be a central aspect of Indian identity that ties communities and cultural practices together. Through Tilo's journey as a Mistress of Spices, the novel illustrates the importance of maintaining cultural traditions while adapting to new environments, and the varied and complex nature of Indian identity.

One of the primary ways in which food represents Indian culture in the novel is through its connection to spirituality. In Hinduism, food and spices have a special place in religious rituals and are believed to possess spiritual powers. Tilo is chosen by the spices to be their mistress, and she understands their powers and the importance of their role in the lives of her customers. Through the use of spices in her work, Tilo is able to heal emotional and spiritual wounds, and bring peace and comfort to those who come to her. Food also represents the diversity and complexity of Indian culture in the novel. Indian cuisine is known for its diverse and rich flavours, and the novel reflects this by highlighting the different spices used in the blends Tilo creates for her customers. The spices come from all over India, and Tilo blends them in unique ways to suit the needs of each individual customer. This emphasis on regional traditions and culinary diversity captures the richness of Indian culture, and highlights the importance of preserving these traditions. The novel also explores the importance of passing on cultural traditions from one generation to another. Tilo's mentor, the First Mother, teaches her how to use the spices and instills in her the importance of preserving their powers. Tilo must then pass on her knowledge to the next *Mistress of Spices*, ensuring that the tradition continues. This reflects the way in which food and spices are used to preserve cultural traditions and to ensure that they are passed down through the generations. The novel also shows how food can bring people together and create a sense of community. Tilo's

customers come from a variety of cultural backgrounds, but they all come to her store seeking comfort and guidance. Tilo is able to bring them together through her work with the spices, fostering a sense of community and connection among her customers. This reflects the way in which food and spices are used to bring people together and to create a sense of belonging. Finally, food and spices represent the complexity of gender roles in Indian culture. Tilo is a strong, independent woman who challenges traditional gender roles, yet she is also deeply connected to her cultural traditions. Through her work as a Mistress of Spices, Tilo is able to navigate the complexities of her gender role and the expectations of her community while still preserving the traditions of her homeland. The novel shows how food can connect people to their spiritual and cultural identity, demonstrate the diversity and complexity of a culture, preserve cultural traditions, and bring people together. As such, *Mistress of Spices* is a testament to the power of food as a symbol of cultural traditions and identity.

Throughout the novel, food and spices symbolize the richness of Indian culture and the importance of preserving traditions in a foreign land. One of the primary ways in which food represents Indian culture in *Mistress of Spices* is its connection to spirituality. In Hinduism, food and spices play important roles in religious rituals and are believed to have spiritual powers. This is evident in the novel when Tilo is chosen by the spices to serve as their mistress and is

entrusted with the task of using the spices to heal people's emotional and spiritual wounds. Through her work as a Mistress of Spices, Tilo is not only able to help people find the right spices for their cooking, but she is also able to heal their hearts and souls. Another way in which food represents Indian culture in the novel is through its ability to evoke memories and emotions. The spices that Tilo uses have the power to transport people back to their homeland and to bring back memories of their childhoods. For example, when Tilo gives an old woman a spice to help her sleep, the spice brings back memories of the woman's mother, who would brew her a special tea with the same spice when she was a child. Food and spices also represent the complexity and diversity of Indian culture in *Mistress of Spices*. India is known for its diverse cuisine, and the novel reflects this by highlighting the variety of spices that Tilo uses in her work. Tilo's spices come from all over India, including Kashmir, Kerala, and Punjab, and she uses them to create blends that are unique to each individual customer. This reflects the importance of regional traditions and the diversity of Indian cuisine. The novel also explores the importance of passing on cultural traditions from one generation to another. Tilo's mentor, the First Mother, teaches her how to use the spices and instills in her the importance of preserving their powers. Tilo, in turn, must pass on her knowledge to the next *Mistress of Spices*, ensuring that the tradition continues. This reflects the way in which food and spices are used to preserve cultural traditions and to ensure that they are passed down through the

generations. Finally, food and spices in *Mistress of Spices* represent the importance of community. Tilo's customers come from a variety of cultural backgrounds, but they all come to her store seeking comfort and guidance. Tilo is able to bring them together through her work with the spices, fostering a sense of community and connection among her customers. This reflects the way in which food and spices are used to bring people together and to create a sense of belonging. The novel's portrayal of food and spices as symbols of Indian culture and values is significant for several reasons. First, it highlights the importance of preserving cultural traditions, especially in communities that are far from home. Through Tilo's work as a Mistress of Spices, the novel shows how food and spices can bring people together and create a sense of community, even in a foreign land. Second, the novel emphasizes the richness and diversity of Indian culture and cuisine. By showcasing the different spices and blending techniques used in various regions of India, *Mistress of Spices* demonstrates the complexity and depth of Indian culinary traditions. Finally, the novel's portrayal of food and spices as spiritual and emotional healers adds a deeper layer of meaning to these cultural symbols. Food and spices are not just sources of sustenance, but also sources of comfort, healing, and connection to one's cultural identity.

Food and spices also represent the complexity and diversity of Indian culture in *Mistress of Spices*. India is known for its diverse

cuisine, and the novel reflects this by highlighting the variety of spices that Tilo uses in her work. Tilo's spices come from all over India, including Kashmir, Kerala, and Punjab, and she uses them to create blends that are unique to each individual customer. This reflects the importance of regional traditions and the diversity of Indian cuisine. The novel also explores the importance of passing on cultural traditions from one generation to another. Tilo's mentor, the First Mother, teaches her how to use the spices and instills in her the importance of preserving their powers. Tilo, in turn, must pass on her knowledge to the next *Mistress of Spices*, ensuring that the tradition continues. This reflects the way in which food and spices are used to preserve cultural traditions and to ensure that they are passed down through the generations. Finally, food and spices in *Mistress of Spices* represent the importance of community. Tilo's customers come from a variety of cultural backgrounds, but they all come to her store seeking comfort and guidance. Tilo is able to bring them together through her work with the spices, fostering a sense of community and connection among her customers. This reflects the way in which food and spices are used to bring people together and to create a sense of belonging. In conclusion, food and spices are important symbols of Indian culture in Chitra Banerjee Divakurni's *Mistress of Spices*. The novel explores how food and spices are intertwined with spirituality, memory, diversity, tradition, and community, reflecting their importance in Indian culture. Through her work with the spices, Tilo is able to heal her customers and bring them together, demonstrating the power of food and spices to inspire, comfort, and connect people.

CHAPTER- 5

**FROM KITCHEN TO COMMUNITIES: FOOD AS
A CULTURAL EMBLEM IN *BEFORE WE VISIT
THE GODDESS***

Indian cuisine is a fascinating blend of rich history, diverse cultures, and age-old traditions. It is an integral part of Indian culture, and food has always been the centre of attention, both in terms of social customs and literature. Chitra Banerjee Divakurni's novel *Before We Visit the Goddess* is a remarkable piece of contemporary Indian Writing in English that emphasizes the significance of food in Indian culture. In this novel, the portrayal of food plays a crucial role in representing Indian culture, connecting the characters with their roots, and serving as a catalyst for change. Food is an essential part of Indian culture and lifestyle, reflecting the country's diverse heritage. Indian cuisine varies from region to region, and each dish represents the culture, customs, and traditions of the people in that area. Festivals, family gatherings, and special occasions revolve around food in India, and each dish has its significance. Food is also symbolic of larger social customs and traditions. For instance, certain dishes are prepared during weddings, birth ceremonies, and other auspicious occasions. In *Before We Visit the Goddess*, food is portrayed as a means of representation of Indian culture and a connection to one's roots. The novel revolves around three

generations of women who have different backgrounds and experiences. Through a character-centric approach, Divakurni uses food to symbolize interconnectedness, comfort, and tradition. The portrayal of food in the novel serves the following purposes:

1. A representation of Indian cuisine: The protagonist's grandmother, Sabitri, is an immigrant from Kolkata, India, and her food is a representation of Indian cuisine. The novel portrays her cooking Bengali dishes like chicken curry, lentils, and rice, which represents her heritage and provides her with a sense of comfort. Divakurni uses food to show how immigrants can connect with their roots and preserve their culture in a foreign land.

2. A bridge between cultures: The novel portrays food as a bridge between cultures. Sabitri's American friend, Reba, invites her to a Thanksgiving dinner where she even cooks Indian dishes like samosas to acknowledge Sabitri's culture. Reba's gesture represents her willingness to understand and appreciate the diversity of cultures and traditions that make America unique.

3. A sense of community: Food is also portrayed as a means of creating a sense of community in the novel. The female characters' shared experiences of cooking and food create a bond stronger than social and economic classes. For instance, Bela, Sabitri's daughter, begins to reconnect with her cultural roots after visiting India and experiencing the flavours of traditional Bengali food.

Food provides Bela with a bridge to connect with her mother and grandmother and understand the rich heritage her family has brought with them to America. *Before We Visit the Goddess* highlights the significance of food in Indian culture and the role it plays in representing this culture in contemporary Indian Writing in English. Food is depicted as an essential element in Indian culture, reflecting its rich history and traditions. The novel portrays the role of food in connecting individuals with their roots, creating a sense of community, and serving as a bridge between cultures. Through the portrayal of food in *Before We Visit the Goddess*, Divakurni emphasizes the significance of Indian cuisine and its role in reflecting Indian culture and social life. Overall, the novel offers a unique perspective on the importance of food and its significance in Indian culture.

Indian culture has always been linked to elaborate cuisines which reflect the country's diverse heritage and customs. In recent years, the portrayal of food in Indian fiction has become a prominent aspect of contemporary Indian Writing in English. *Before We Visit the Goddess* is an excellent example of this trend. In this novel, food plays a significant role in representing and preserving Indian culture, connecting characters to their ancestral roots, and creating a sense of community. Food is an integral part of Indian culture, with various traditions associated with different types of cuisines across the country. From north to south, different regions have their

specialties, and each dish tells a story about the region's history, culture, and lifestyle. Moreover, food in India is considered symbolic of larger social customs and traditions. For example, festivals like Diwali and Holi are celebrated with specific foods, sweets, and snacks. Marriages, births, and other auspicious events also revolve around food. *Before We Visit the Goddess* is a novel that spans three generations of women, who come from different backgrounds and have different experiences. Throughout the novel, food is portrayed as a symbol of interconnectedness between generations, a source of comfort, and a means of preserving traditions. Sabitri, the grandmother of the story's primary protagonist, represents the traditional values and customs of Indian culture. She immigrated to America from Kolkata, India, and her food is symbolic of her heritage. For example, she cooks traditional Bengali dishes like chicken curry, lentils, and rice. These dishes represent her roots and provide a sense of comfort, binding her to her culture and traditions. Through Sabitri's cooking, Divakurni shows how food can help immigrants connect with their ancestral roots and preserve their culture in a foreign land. Additionally, Divakurni portrays food as a bridge between cultures. For instance, Sabitri's friend, Reba, who is an American, invites her to a Thanksgiving dinner, but Reba also cooks Indian dishes, including samosas, to acknowledge Sabitri's culture. Reba's gesture represents an attempt to understand and honour the diversity of cultures that makes America unique. Furthermore, the novel showcases how food

can create a sense of community. The female characters' shared experiences of food and cooking create a bond stronger than social and economic classes. For example, Sabitri's daughter, Bela, begins to reconnect with her cultural roots after she travels to India, where she experiences the flavours of traditional Bengali food. In this moment, food provides a bridge for Bela to connect with her mother and grandmother and understand the rich heritage her family has brought with them to America. Through the characters' interaction with food, Divakurni portrays how food can bring different people and cultures together and forge a sense of community. The novel highlights the significance of food in Indian culture and its ability to preserve traditions and connect immigrants with their cultural roots. Food serves as a symbol of interconnectedness between generations, providing a means of understanding and honouring diverse cultures. Through this portrayal, Divakurni showcases the richness and diversity of Indian cuisine and culture. In contemporary Indian Writing in English, the portrayal of food has become a significant aspect, reflecting the importance of cuisine in Indian social and cultural life.

Food plays a significant role in the novel as a symbol of connection, tradition, and a bridge to the homeland. The novel portrays how the food culture of one's home country can hide in plain sight, under the melting pot of America. Through the characters' interactions with food, Divakurni emphasizes its role as

a means of preserving cultural heritage, building community, and bridging the gap between diaspora and their ancestral roots. The novel presents a multicultural representation of Indian food, showcasing its vast diversity and richness. Though immigrant families may adopt new food customs, many of them still cling to the traditional dishes of their homeland. For example, Sabitri, who migrates from Kolkata to America, uses the Indian spices in her cooking, which act as a reminder of the food culture of her native place. Similarly, Usha, Sabitri's granddaughter, appreciates the flavours of her grandmother's cooking, which remind her of her cultural heritage. The novel allows the readers to witness the flavours, tastes, and smells of India, which convey the richness of its culinary landscape. Food serves as a means of community-building and connection in the novel. It brings together people of different backgrounds and provides a platform for cultural exchange. For instance, when Sabitri's best friend, Reba, invites her to a Thanksgiving dinner, the two women share their experiences of food and cultural traditions. Reba also prepares non-traditional Thanksgiving food, like samosas, to honour Sabitri's cultural background. This scene highlights how food can bridge the gap between different cultures and connect people. Moreover, food plays an essential role in preserving cultural heritage. For instance, during Durga Puja, Sabitri's mother-in-law prepares traditional Bengali sweets. This reflects the cultural significance of the festival and how food is an integral part of the celebrations. Through food, cultural

values are transmitted from one generation to another, preserving the heritage and keeping the traditions alive. This demonstrates how food can act as a unifying force, and how it can be used to maintain cultural traditions and heritage. The novel illustrates how food can act as a bridge between diaspora and their ancestral roots. Sabitri's daughter, Bela, who had grown up in America and did not have a strong connection to her Indian heritage, returns to India and experiences the flavours of the traditional food. She begins to feel a sense of belonging and reconnects with her cultural roots. This illustrates the significance of food as a way of connecting diaspora to their ancestral homeland, allowing them to reconnect with their traditions and identity. *Before We Visit the Goddess* explores the complexities of diaspora and the role food play as a symbol of connection to one's cultural heritage, building community, and bridging the gap between the diaspora and their ancestral roots. Food acts as a powerful tool in transmitting cultural heritage across generations, preserving traditions, and maintaining the national identity. The novel provides a dynamic perspective of the relationship between food, culture, and identity, highlighting the richness and diversity of the Indian national and diaspora culture.

In this novel, food is not just a means of nourishment, it is also a representation of cultural traditions and values. The characters' interactions with food reveal insights into their cultural background, beliefs, and history. Food is an important aspect of national identity,

as it reflects the cultural heritage and traditions of a country. In *Before We Visit the Goddess*, food is used as a tool to explore how individuals connect with their cultural identity. The novel portrays a diverse range of Indian food, from the sweet and savoury snacks of Kolkata to the spicy South Indian curries, which reflects the country's regional diversity. Through the characters' interactions with food, Divakurni highlights the value of cultural traditions and the intergenerational transmission of heritage. For example, the character Sabitri's mother-in-law prepares traditional Bengali sweets during the Durga Puja celebration, which is a reminder of her roots and cultural heritage. Sabitri, who initially finds the tradition burdensome and outdated, eventually comes to appreciate the importance of the celebration and the food associated with it. This illustrates how food can bring present generations closer to their cultural heritage, and how food can be a catalyst for cultural preservation. The novel also uses food as a symbol to explore the concept of home and belonging. For Sabitri, who has migrated to America, food is a means of feeling connected to her homeland. To her, cooking and consuming Indian food is a way of maintaining a link to her cultural roots and finding a sense of home in a new place. Similarly, for Usha, Sabitri's granddaughter, food serves as a reminder of her grandmother and her cultural heritage, which she learns to appreciate through Sabitri's cooking. Food is also used in the novel to express the complexities of identities shaped by migration and diaspora. Sabitri's daughter, Bela, who has grown up

in America consuming a mix of American and Indian food, struggles to connect with her cultural heritage. However, after returning to India and tasting the culinary delights, she begins to feel a sense of belonging and desire to reconnect with her cultural roots. This illustrates how food can act as a powerful tool in bridging the gap between the cultural heritage of the immigrants' parent culture and the cultural landscape of the adopted country. Thus, the novel highlights how food can serve as a powerful symbol of national identity. It underscores how food is not just about nourishment, but also a representation of cultural traditions, values, and heritage. Furthermore, the novel captures the significance of food in portraying how individuals connect with their cultural identity, the role food plays as a reminder of one's homeland, and the complexities of identities shaped by migration and diaspora. Ultimately, the novel shows how food brings together individuals across regional and historical divides, which contribute to the richness and diversity of the Indian national identity.

Before We Visit the Goddess is a powerful novel that explores the complex societal norms that govern life in India, particularly the patriarchal norms that have long defined the country's social and cultural landscape. One of the most prominent symbols in the book is food, which serves as a powerful metaphor for the patriarchal norms that shape the lives of women in India. Food is used throughout the novel to convey the gendered roles and expectations

that are placed on women in Indian society. From the beginning of the novel, the preparation of food is portrayed as a traditionally female activity, with Sabitri and her mother-in-law working together to make sweets and snacks for the family. Women are expected to be skilled in the kitchen, and their ability to prepare meals is often viewed as a marker of their worth and value as wives and mothers. However, as the novel progresses, it becomes clear that food is not just a symbol of traditional gender roles, but also a way in which patriarchal norms are enforced and maintained. For example, Sabitri's daughter, Bela, is discouraged from pursuing her dreams of becoming a writer and is instead pressured into marrying a wealthy man so that she can secure a stable future for herself. Throughout the novel, Bela is shown to place great importance on her appearance and on maintaining the perfect image of a dutiful wife and mother – a standard that is reinforced by the food she prepares and serves. Similarly, the men in the novel use food as a way to assert their dominance and enforce patriarchal norms. Sabitri's son-in-law, TC, is shown to be a controlling and abusive partner, and his behaviour is often mirrored in the way he treats food. He is obsessed with achieving the perfect taste and appearance in his meals, and his anger often erupts when his expectations are not met. This mirrors the way he treats Bela, whom he sees as a subordinate whose primary role is to conform to his expectations and needs. Food is also used in the novel to highlight the sexual double standards that exist in Indian society. For example, when Sabitri has a brief liaison

with a man she meets on a train, he gives her a packet of sweets as a gift. This act of sharing food is symbolic of their sexual connection, but it also highlights the taboo around female sexuality in India. Women who engage in sexual behaviour outside of marriage are often stigmatized, while men who do the same are often praised for their virility. Throughout the novel, food serves as a powerful symbol of the patriarchal norms that shape life in India. It highlights the gendered roles and expectations that are placed on women, the way men use food as a way to assert their dominance and control, and the sexual double standards that exist in Indian society. By using food in this way, Divakurni emphasizes the need for change in Indian society – for women to be given equal opportunities and respect, and for patriarchal norms to be challenged and dismantled. Ultimately, food serves as a powerful reminder of the work that still needs to be done to achieve gender equality in India.

The novel spans three generations and explores the changing cultural, social, and political dynamics of India. Through the use of food, the novel delves deep into the economic status of different characters, highlighting the complex relationships between food, class, and power. The use of food as a metaphorical motif in the novel is evident from the very start. The opening scene of the novel begins with Sabitri, the protagonist, preparing the "laddoos," a traditional Indian sweet. This sets the tone for the novel, as every

important meal or feast in India is marked by special food items that reflect the economic status of the person hosting the event. Hence, the novel uses food as a metaphor to explore the economic status of different characters in the novel. One of the primary ways in which food serves as a metaphor in the novel is in its portrayal of the link between food, class, and power. In Indian society, food is an important status symbol, and the novel portrays this link through the way different characters view and consume food. For instance, Sabitri's daughter, Bela, is shown to consume expensive foods and drinks, such as imported champagne, to symbolize her wealth and social standing. In contrast, Sabitri's struggle to make ends meet and her dependence on simple food items like rice and lentils reflect her lower economic status. Furthermore, the novel uses food as a metaphor to explore the economic disparities between different characters in the novel. Through the portrayal of different characters' food habits and preferences, the novel highlights the economic disparities that exist in Indian society. For instance, Sabitri's lifelong dream of opening a sweet shop is constantly thwarted by her low economic status, whereas her son-in-law, TC, who belongs to a wealthy family, has the necessary resources to start his own business. Additionally, food serves as a metaphor to explore the impact of economic disparities on social relationships and interactions in Indian society. The novel portrays how economic status influences social relationships and interactions in Indian society. For instance, Bela's marriage to a wealthy businessman is

shown to be driven more by economic considerations than love or companionship. Here, food serves as a metaphor to highlight the role of economic status in shaping social dynamics in the novel. Moreover, the novel uses food as a metaphor to explore the cyclical nature of poverty and economic disadvantage in India. The novel portrays how economic status is often determined by one's birth and family background, leading to a cycle of poverty and economic stagnation that is difficult to break. For instance, the novel highlights how Sabitri's impoverished background and lack of access to educational and economic opportunities shape her economic prospects and limit her options in life. Through the use of food, the novel highlights the link between food, class, and power, the economic disparities that exist in Indian society, the impact of economic status on social relationships and interactions, and the cyclical nature of poverty and economic disadvantage in India. Food serves as a lens through which readers can gain insights into the complex relationships between food, economics, and social dynamics in India and underscores the importance of addressing economic inequalities in the country.

The novel spans three generations and explores the changing cultural, social, and political dynamics of India. Through the use of food, the novel delves deep into the religious traditions of the country, highlighting the complex relationships between food, faith, and religious practices. The use of food as a metaphorical motif in

the novel is evident from the very start. The opening scene of the novel begins with Sabitri, the protagonist, preparing the "laddoos," a traditional Indian sweet. This sets the tone for the novel, as every important religious festival or ceremony in India is marked by special food items that are prepared as offerings to the Gods. Hence, the novel uses food as a metaphor to explore the religious customs and practices of the Indian society. One of the primary ways in which food serves as a metaphor in the novel is in its portrayal of the link between food, religious practices, and spirituality. Food is a critical aspect of religious practices in India, and the novel portrays this link through the process of making offerings to the Gods. For instance, when Sabitri makes the "laddoos," she is careful to follow the traditional recipe and uses high-quality ingredients to make sure that the offering is pleasing to the deity. Here, the novel highlights the importance of religious rituals and the role played by food in strengthening the bond between humans and the divine. Furthermore, the novel uses food as a metaphor to explore the role of religion in shaping the cultural identity of India. The food that is consumed in India is deeply entwined with religious customs and practices. For example, vegetarianism is a widely followed practice among the Hindu community, as it is considered a way to achieve purity of mind and body. By emphasizing the importance of these customs, the novel portrays how food plays a vital role in shaping the cultural identities of different communities in India. Additionally, food serves as a metaphor to explore the impact of

religious practices on the social norms and values of Indian society. The novel portrays how religious customs and traditions influence social relationships and interactions in Indian society. For instance, the tradition of serving food to guests, regardless of their social and economic status, is deeply ingrained in the Indian culture. The novel highlights how this tradition reflects the values of hospitality and kindness, which are deeply rooted in the religious traditions of the country. Moreover, the novel uses food as a metaphor to explore the diversity of religious practices and traditions in India. India is a land of diverse religions, and the novel portrays the various religious customs and practices across different communities in the country. For instance, the novel portrays the influence of Jainism, a religion that prescribes strict vegetarianism, on the eating habits of some characters in the novel. Here, food serves as a metaphor to highlight the role of religious diversity in shaping India's cultural identity. Through the use of food, the novel highlights the link between food, religious practices, and spirituality, the role of religion in shaping India's cultural identity, the influence of religious practices on social norms and values, and the diversity of religious customs and traditions in the country. Food serves as a lens through which readers can gain insights into the complex relationships between food, faith, and religious practices in India and underscores the importance of preserving cultural heritage for future generations.

In *Before We Visit the Goddess*, food serves as a metaphor to portray the historical aspects of Indian society. The novel spans three generations and explores the changing cultural, social, and political dynamics of India. Through the use of food, the novel provides a nuanced understanding of the historical aspects of Indian society, highlighting the complex relationships between food, culture, and politics. One of the primary ways in which food is used as a metaphor is in its portrayal of the cultural identity of different regions of India. For instance, Sabitri's food stall in Kolkata serves traditional Bengali cuisine and is a symbol of the cultural heritage of West Bengal. As Sabitri's granddaughter, Tara, travels to America, she attempts to recreate the traditional dishes of her grandmother's food stall, which she sees as a way to connect with and preserve her cultural identity. The use of food, in this case, highlights the importance of preserving cultural heritage in the face of rapid globalization and cultural homogenization. Furthermore, food is used as a metaphor to explore the caste and class differences that exist in Indian society. Sabitri and her family are from a low-caste background, and her food stall is located in a working-class area. The novel portrays the struggle of Sabitri and her daughter Bela to make ends meet in a society that is deeply divided by economic and social inequalities. The food that Sabitri serves is simple and is symbolic of the limited resources and opportunities available to marginalized communities in India. The novel also highlights how access to food can be used as a tool of power, with wealthy and

powerful individuals controlling the food supply and determining who has access to it. Additionally, food is used as a metaphor to explore the role of women in Indian society. For instance, when Sabitri's daughter, Bela, moves to America, she finds solace in cooking and uses her culinary skills to build a new life for herself. The novel highlights how women have traditionally been confined to domestic spaces and how cooking and culinary skills have been an important means for women to express themselves and exert agency. Moreover, food is used as a metaphor to explore the way in which historical events have shaped Indian society. For instance, the novel portrays the effects of the Bengal Famine of 1943 on Sabitri and her family. The famine, which was caused by a lack of rainfall and exacerbated by British colonial policies, caused widespread starvation and deaths in Bengal. The novel uses food to highlight the devastating effects of the famine and its lasting impact on the collective memory of Bengalis. Through the use of food, the novel highlights the cultural identity of different regions of India, the caste and class differences that exist in Indian society, the role of women, and the way historical events have shaped Indian society. Food serves as a lens through which readers can gain insights into the complex relationships between food, culture, and politics in India, and the novel underscores the importance of preserving cultural heritage in a rapidly changing world.

While the novel primarily focuses on the personal lives of its characters, it also touches upon political themes such as corruption, poverty, and power struggles. The novel uses food as a metaphor to highlight these political themes, thereby providing readers with a nuanced understanding of Indian politics and society. Through the use of food, the novel portrays the corruption and power struggles that exist in Indian society. For instance, the character of Rezwan, a wealthy patron of Sabitri's food stall, uses his financial and social power to control and exploit people around him. He manipulates situations to his advantage, takes bribes, and uses his political connections to further his interests. Rezwan's preference for gourmet food reflects his desire to maintain his social status and to differentiate himself from the masses. In contrast, Sabitri, a woman from a poor background, uses her cooking skills to uplift her economic condition and provide for her daughter. The contrast between Rezwan's and Sabitri's relationship with food highlights the power disparities and corruption prevalent in Indian politics. Food also serves as a metaphor for poverty and the struggle for survival in India. The novel portrays how food becomes a means of survival for the characters, particularly for Sabitri and her daughter Bela. Sabitri's food stall becomes her only source of income, and she works hard to provide for her daughter. The novel highlights the challenges faced by impoverished individuals in a society where access to food is limited. Furthermore, the novel's portrayal of the regional cuisine of Bengal, with all its unique ingredients, methods,

and flavours, underlines the role of food as a crucial element of cultural identity. Through the use of food as a metaphor, the novel makes a powerful statement about the socio-economic inequalities in India. Additionally, food serves as a metaphor for the prejudices and discrimination prevalent in Indian society. The novel highlights how food can become a site of cultural conflict and discrimination. For example, when Bela arrives in America, she struggles with her racial identity and finds solace in cooking traditional Indian food. However, some of her classmates ridicule her for her cultural practices, and she needs to defend her food and culture. This incident is indicative of the biases and prejudices that continue to exist in the modern world and provides insight into how food becomes a site of cultural dominance or resistance. Through food, the novel highlights the corruption and power struggles prevalent in Indian politics, the challenges faced by poor and marginalized individuals, and the biases and prejudices that persist in society. The use of food as a metaphor provides readers with unique insights into the political and cultural identity of India and highlights the significance of food in representing issues of identity, power, and resistance. Ultimately, food serves as a metaphor that helps readers realize the connections that exist between politics, culture, and identity, and how food can act as a window into a society's political landscape.

Divakurni uses food to highlight the complex social reality of India, including issues of gender, class, and migration. By using

food as a metaphor, Divakurni provides readers with a nuanced understanding of Indian culture and society. Through the use of food, the novel explores the gender roles and expectations in Indian society. The novel illustrates how women are expected to cook and provide food for their families, while men take on more public roles. The protagonist Sabitri is a single mother who works tirelessly to provide for her daughter. She spends most of her life working in a food stall, selling snacks and meals to patrons. Sabitri's cooking represents her dedication to her daughter and her determination to provide her with the best possible life. On the other hand, Bela, Sabitri's daughter, is a college student in America, who faces several challenges in balancing her academic pursuits and traditional expectations of being a woman, who has to cook for her husband. Additionally, food serves as a metaphor for social class and inequality in Indian society. Throughout the novel, Divakurni highlights the social and economic disparities that exist in India and how they are reflected in the food culture. For example, Sabitri comes from a poor, rural background, and her cuisine includes simple, rustic dishes such as pitha and luchi, while wealthy individuals such as Sabitri's patron, Rezwan, consider gourmet dishes as a sign of their higher social status. The diversity of the dishes and eating habits across different social strata reveals the immense cultural and economic diversity in India. Food also serves as a metaphor for migration and diaspora in the novel. The characters in the novel migrate from one place to another, bringing

their food culture with them. For example, Sabitri prepares her traditional Bengali cuisine in America, Bela tries to replicate her mother's cooking in her American home, and Tara, Sabitri's granddaughter learns traditional cooking from Sabitri. The migration of food and its adaptations throughout generations represent migratory patterns and the formation of diasporic cultures. Food marks an individual's cultural connection with their homeland, and in the case of the characters in the novel, it ties them to India. From gender roles to social class and migration, food provides insight into the cultural complexities of Indian society. The novel's use of food as a metaphor provides readers with a nuanced understanding of the social realities of India and highlights the significance of food in representing issues of culture, identity, and community. Ultimately food serves as a metaphor that helps readers realize the connections that exist between social strife and cultural practices, and how food can act as a window into a culture's social fabric.

Through the characters' experiences with food, the novel highlights the differences in taste, preparation, and presentation of food among different cultural groups. For example, Sabitri, one of the main characters, grew up in a small Indian village and prepares food differently than her daughter Bela, who grew up in the United States. Sabitri's cooking reflects her rural Indian upbringing, where she learned to cook with spices and flavoring, while Bela's cooking

reflects her American upbringing, which is less reliant on spices and more on Western-style cuisine. By demonstrating these differences, the novel explores how food serves as a tool for exploring cultural diversity. Moreover, the novel portrays food as a tool for cultural exchange and learning. The characters sample different cuisines from different cultures, expanding their cultural palate and learning about new cultures. For example, Sabitri tries American fast food for the first time when she visits Bela in the United States, and later, Bela tries Indian street food when she visits her friend's family. Through these experiences, the novel shows how food can be a medium for learning about new cultures and expanding one's cultural understanding. Additionally, the novel emphasizes the significance of food in maintaining cultural traditions and heritage. Food serves as a tool for preserving cultural identity and passing on cultural values from one generation to the next. For example, Sabitri's mother cooked traditional Indian dishes, and Sabitri tries to replicate these recipes in her new home. The novel highlights how food can be used to maintain and preserve cultural traditions and how these traditions can be passed down through generations. Finally, food serves as a tool for bonding and nurturing relationships in the novel. Throughout the book, characters bond and establish connections over food, whether it's sharing meals with family or cooking with friends. For example, Sabitri and her granddaughter Tara bond while cooking together, and Bela uses cooking as a way to connect with her daughter and pass on her family's traditions.

Through these experiences, the novel emphasizes how food can be used to strengthen relationships and establish connections across cultures. The novel portrays food as a tool for exploring cultural diversity, learning about new cultures, preserving cultural traditions, and strengthening relationships. By emphasizing the importance of food in maintaining cultural identity and passing on cultural values, the novel highlights how food can be used to explore one's ethnic roots and maintain cultural diversity. Ultimately, the novel reinforces the idea that food is a powerful tool for exploring cultural diversity and promoting cultural understanding.

Divakurni explores the significance of food in connecting with one's culture and cultural diversity. The novel follows the lives of three generations of women who navigate their identity, including their Indian roots, and the role of food in their lives. Divakurni vividly portrays food as a symbolic tool, reflecting the complexities of Indian identity and exploring cultural diversity. One of the ways food serves as a tool to explore cultural diversity in the novel is by highlighting the differences in taste, preparation, and presentation of food among different cultural groups. For instance, Sabitri, who grew up in an Indian village, prepares food differently from her daughter Bela, who grew up in the United States. In Sabitri's village, spices are used to give food flavour, while Bela often opts for Western-style food that is not as spicy. Through these differences, the novel explores how food reflects cultural diversity and how food

can be used to bridge the gap between cultures. Moreover, food is portrayed as a tool for cultural exchange and understanding. Throughout the novel, characters taste and sample different foods from different cultures, showcasing the diversity of cuisines and traditions. For example, Sabitri tries American fast food for the first time when she visits the United States, and later, Bela tries Indian street food with her friend's family. These experiences emphasize how food can be a medium for learning about new cultures and expanding one's cultural palate. Furthermore, the novel shows how food can signify the significance of tradition and heritage. For instance, when Bela visits India, she notices the family's cooking methods and how they are handed down from one generation to another. Sabitri's mother, whom she has fond memories of, cooked traditional dishes, which Sabitri tries to replicate in her new home. The significance of these traditional dishes and methods of cooking highlights how food serves as a tool to maintain and preserve cultural heritage and identity. Lastly, food is portrayed as a tool for bonding and nurturing relationships. Throughout the novel, characters share meals with friends, family, and acquaintances, bonding over food and establishing connections. For example, Sabitri and her granddaughter, Tara, bond while cooking together, and Bela uses cooking as a way to connect with her daughter and pass on her family's traditions. Through such experiences, the novel highlights how food serves as a tool for strengthening relationships across cultures. Divakurni captures the significance of food in

establishing cultural identity and its role in bridging cultures, preserving traditions, and bonding people together. It is through food that the novel showcases the diversity of cultures and how it can be a medium for cultural exchange and understanding. Ultimately, *Before We Visit the Goddess* reinforces the idea that food is a powerful tool for exploring cultural diversity and promoting cultural understanding.

Through the portrayal of food and its significance in the lives of the main characters, the author highlights the complexities of Indian identity and the way it is tied to cultural traditions and practices. The novel follows three generations of women in an Indian family, including Sabitri, her daughter Bela, and granddaughter Tara, as they navigate their identities as individuals and immigrants. Food is paramount to their experiences as it is intertwined with cultural practices and heritage. To begin with, in Sabitri's village, food is a luxury that reflects the family's economic struggles. It is hence a symbol of their roots and connection to the land. Sabitri had grown up in a family that took pride in preparing delicious meals despite their hardships. Consequently, her memories of homemade food play a vital role in her journey, and she longs to recreate those familiar flavours in her new home. This desire highlights how food serves as a way to connect with one's heritage, bridging the gap between the present and the past. Moreover, Indian culture has various traditions, including culinary ones. Holi, for instance, is an

Indian festival characterized by the preparation and consumption of traditional sweets, signifying the importance of food during cultural celebrations. Divakurni uses Holi to emphasize the significance of food in Indian identity, emphasizing its integral role in binding people together. The protagonist, Bela, also uses food as a tool to understand and explore her Indian identity. Having grown up in the United States, she is disconnected from her heritage. However, her memories of Indian food and the ways it was prepared and consumed in her childhood home, brings her back to her roots and connects her to her culture. Bela's urge to cook and experiment with new recipes reflects her desire to reclaim her identity and maintain her connection to her cultural roots. Finally, like the generations before her, Bela passes on her family culinary traditions to her daughter Tara. The transfer of knowledge from one generation to another reaffirms how values that are preserved through food, traditions, and practices, are essential in shaping and maintaining identity. The use of food in the novel, in this respect, confirms the idea that identity encompasses both personal and cultural experiences. Through food, Divakurni portrays the nuances of Indian identity and the significance of cultural links in defining an individual's sense of self.

Indian culture is known for its rich and diverse cuisine that reflects the country's customs, traditions, and values. In *Before We Visit the Goddess*, food serves as a means of representing Indian

cultural traditions. The novel follows the lives of three generations of Indian women who navigate their identities as immigrants and their experiences as part of the Indian diaspora. Through the portrayal of food and its significance to the characters' lives, Divakurni explores the intricacies of Indian culture and the importance of preserving traditions. The novel opens with Sabitri, who grows up in a small village in India where the family's economic struggles make food a precious commodity. Sabitri's mother, despite their challenges, takes pride in providing delicious meals for her family. The food they eat represents not only their cultural heritage but also their connection to their community and land. Sabitri moves away from her village to Kolkata and later to the United States, but the memories of her mother's cooking stay with her. The significance of food in Sabitri's life is evident through her nostalgia for her mother's cooking, which reminds her of her roots. As the novel progresses, the importance of food as a cultural tradition is explored further through Bela's character. Bela is Sabitri's daughter, and she grows up in the United States, disconnected from her Indian heritage. However, food provides a connection for Bela to her cultural roots. She craves the flavours of her childhood, and she attempts to recreate dishes from her past in her own kitchen. Bela's struggle to balance her American and Indian identities is emblematic of the challenges faced by many immigrants and their descendants. Food becomes not just a source of nourishment but also a means of preserving cultural identity. The

novel also illustrates how food is an integral part of Indian festivals and celebrations. For example, the preparation and consumption of traditional sweets like gujiya during Holi signify the importance of food as an essential component of cultural celebrations. The rituals and customs of Indian festivals are closely tied to food, highlighting the significance of food in Indian culture. Moreover, the novel depicts the passing down of food traditions from one generation to the next. Bela teaches her daughter Tara how to cook Indian food, passing down family recipes that have been preserved for generations. The act of passing down recipes and culinary techniques is a way to preserve cultural traditions and keep them alive. Food serves as a reminder of one's cultural roots, connects people to their past, and brings generations together. The portrayal of food traditions in the novel emphasizes the importance of preserving cultural heritage, even as people migrate and experience cultural assimilation. Food is an integral part of Indian culture, and its depiction in literature can promote the significance of preserving cultural traditions for future generations.

The narrative is a multi-generational story of three women and their often complex relationships with each other and their cultural heritage. The portrayal of food and its significance in Indian culture serves as a recurring motif in the novel to highlight the importance of preserving cultural identity. The novel begins with Sabitri's story, a young girl living in a village in rural India. Sabitri's mother's

cooking is often the only joy for their struggling family. The food they eat is tied to their cultural heritage, and it is seen as a means of preserving their past while celebrating their present. Food plays a metaphorical role for the warmth and love Sabitri's mother provides despite their challenging circumstance. The significance of the food they eat is emphasized by the fact that even after Sabitri moves away from her village, the memory of her mother's cooking stays with her. As the novel progresses, it illustrates the importance of food in Indian culture through Bela's character, Sabitri's daughter. Bela grows up in America, and she feels unconnected to her Indian heritage. However, food is a significant tool that bridges the gap between her past and her present. Bela's yearning for the food she remembers from her childhood, and her attempts to recreate it in her own kitchen, demonstrates the importance of food in maintaining cultural identity, even when one is far from home. The novel also illustrates how food traditions are passed down from generation to generation, such as Bela teaching her daughter Tara to cook Indian food. Moreover, the novel also explores the role of food in the customs and traditions of Indian culture. For example, the celebration of Holi, the festival of colours, is incomplete without the preparation and enjoyment of traditional Indian sweets like gujiya. Divakurni's portrayal of the food during Holi emphasizes the importance of food as a part of cultural identity and the celebration of life's precious moments. Overall, Divakurni's *Before We Visit the Goddess* reveals the importance of food as a representation of Indian

cultural values. Food acts as a tool to preserve cultural identity, connect people with their past, and unite different generations and cultures. By portraying food in the novel, Divakurni highlights the significance of preserving cultural practices and traditions, even as immigrants and their descendants move away from their homelands. Food in Indian culture serves as a reminder of one's roots, a source of comfort, and a way to celebrate life's significant moments. Therefore, it is an integral part of Indian culture, and its representation in literature plays an essential role in promoting the significance of preserving these cultural traditions.

The novel explores the lives of three generations of women and their complex relationships with each other and their cultural heritage. The portrayal of food and its significance in Indian culture is a recurring motif in the novel, which serves to highlight the importance of preserving cultural identity. The novel begins with the story of Sabitri, a young girl growing up in a village in eastern India. Sabitri's family is poor, and her mother's cooking is often the only joy in their lives. The food they eat is linked to their cultural heritage, and it is portrayed as a way of preserving their past while celebrating their present. Food is also used as a metaphor for the warmth and love that Sabitri's mother provides, despite their difficult circumstances. The significance of the food they eat is emphasized by the fact that even after Sabitri moves away from her village, the memory of her mother's cooking stays with her. As the

novel progresses, the importance of food in Indian culture is further explored through the character of Bela, Sabitri's daughter. Bela grows up in America and is disconnected from her Indian heritage. However, food is a significant tool that bridges the gap between her past and present. Bela's longing for the food she remembers from her childhood and her attempts to recreate it in her own kitchen reveals the significance of food in maintaining cultural identity, even when one is far from home. The novel also explores how food traditions are passed down from generation to generation, as Bela's daughter, Tara, learns to cook Indian food from her mother and grandmother. Furthermore, the novel also explores the role of food in the customs and traditions of Indian culture. For instance, the celebration of Holi, the festival of colours, is incomplete without the preparation and enjoyment of traditional Indian sweets like gujiya. Divakurni's portrayal of the food during Holi accentuates the importance of food as part of the cultural identity and the celebration of life's precious moments. Overall, Divakurni's *Before We Visit the Goddess* demonstrates the significance of food in representing Indian culture. Food is used as a tool to preserve cultural identity, to connect people with their past, and to bridge the gap between different generations and cultures. Through the portrayal of food in the novel, Divakurni highlights the importance of preserving cultural traditions and practices, even as immigrants and their descendants move away from their homelands. Food in Indian culture serves as a reminder of one's roots, a source of comfort, and

a way to celebrate life's significant moments. As such, it is an integral part of Indian culture, and its representation in literature plays an essential role in promoting the significance of preserving these cultural traditions.

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