

How to Cite:

Ravindran, N., & Gayathri, M. V. (2022). Culinary desire: gastronomical trajectory in book of Rachel by Esther David. *International Journal of Health Sciences*, 6(S1), 6899–6907.
<https://doi.org/10.53730/ijhs.v6nS1.6712>

Culinary desire: Expounding the gastronomical trajectory in book of Rachel by Esther David

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Abstract---The topic of food has recently taken the centre stage. Each culture depicts its distinctive cuisine, as well as its specific traditional rules and eating habits, in its literature. Food can be used to create compelling visuals. Food practices elicit a variety of associations in the minds of different writers. Food can be perceived not only via the particular senses of smell and taste but also through the other senses. It aids in the evocation of more memories and sensations. As a result, food imagery in literature may seem like a source of deeply implanted associations that lead into the depths of personal and societal memory. Book of Rachel by Esther David is a celebration of culinary obsessions and the metaphors that come with them. The novel is structured like a recipe, with each chapter beginning with a signature dish and a list of ingredients. An attempt has been made to analyze and bring to light the relationship between food and literature in Esther David's novel "Book of Rachel."

Keywords---Food and Literature, Food Culture, Book of Rachel.

Introduction

Postcolonial works have been coloured by shades of sensibility and sparks of theories since their inception in the twentieth century. Food studies, on the other hand, have gained traction in recent years and are now being integrated into postcolonial research. In the realm of post-colonial fiction, this work aims to highlight the connection between food and writing.

When it comes to food, one becomes immersed in a rich and difficult mosaic of languages, grammar, narratives, discourses, and customs, all of which are delicately woven together. In this binding, they overlap and even "contradict" one

another. A recent investigation of the relationship between food and literature was conducted. Despite its huge cultural relevance, food studies have only just begun to receive the scientific attention it deserves. From the period of Structuralists like Claude Levi-Strauss and Roland Barthes, food has been recognised as a significant human behavioural code. In literary and critical works, food is examined in relation to complex cultural debates concerning identity, history, modernity, religion, and gender. Food practices indicate and connote a way of defining these cultures, occupying borders, and wrestling with issues of power, memory, dislocation, and belonging for ethnic populations whose sense of homeland is problematic.

Book of Rachel is a tribute to Bene-Israeli cuisine. It's the story of Rachel Dandekar, who lives alone in her ancestral home in India's Danda beach village. Both the text and the food produced within it reflect the Jewish community. So both argue for the spatial rights of the Jewish minority in India since the Jewish community in India began migrating to Israel following Zionism. She must fight for her cultural and geographical spatial rights. The synagogue serves as a reminder of India's long-forgotten Jewish past. Rachel's refusal to skip synagogue is motivated by nostalgia, and it is an attempt to preserve her family name for future generations.

The Junctive of Food and Literature

Researchers have only recently begun to explore the relevance of food and eating in texts, despite the fact that food imagery has long been used in literature. "Despite its omnipresence in literature, food has not historically been regarded a subject worthy of literary study,"(6) note Keeling and Pollard. Food studies, like Cultural Studies in general, are gaining traction, and literary theorists are increasingly recognising the value of studying cuisine literature for a variety of reasons, including the fact that food plays a range of roles in literature. Food in literature can be used to investigate a variety of structural and contextual themes in a novel.

Food-related pictures in literature appeal to the reader's senses, especially when combined with rich details and descriptions, boosting the work's realism. They use sensory images that readers may identify with, such as recognizable sights, smells, and tastes. In *One Reader's Digest: Toward a Gastronomic Theory of Literature*, Brad Kessler feels that "Food in fiction incorporates all the reader's senses (taste, touch, feel, sight, and smell)" (151).

Splicing of Food Imagery and Literature

Food-related depictions can be used to create a mood, give readers a visual, express a concept, portray an emotion, dramatize a scenario, or add realism to a piece of writing. They frequently assist readers in understanding a character's predicament, socioeconomic class, personality, emotions, or even race, among other factors affecting a character and a storyline.

Recent food studies trends have opened up new avenues in literary studies to examine how food imagery and metaphor are used in literature to represent

complex notions and deeper meanings. In academic food studies, food symbolism is explored to reflect cultural identity, which spans a wide range of topics such as social position, sexual desire, gender interactions, and ideological opinions. Culinary history societies are forming, as are new academic periodicals. Newspapers and magazines publish weekly recipes or restaurant reviews. Food shows on the radio and television have a sizable following. Eating out has become fashionable. Food memoirs, essays, and dozens of excellent websites devoted to the severe research of food cultures and styles all have booming markets. Linda Civitello, a prominent Italian-American food historian, and author ponder the significance of food. Humans are the ones who live by leaning toward symbols. Food has significantly more meaning for males than it does for survival. It's been used in rituals for generations to ensure fertility, wealth, a happy marriage, and a happy afterlife. It has been used to demonstrate the authority and wealth of states, churches, corporations, and individuals.

Concatenate between Food and Culture

David M Kaplan, the renowned editor of *The Philosophy of Food* (2012), proclaims that food plays a significant part in religious traditions all across the world. Religions frequently prescribe which foods should be taken and which should be avoided, provide value to food production, preparation, and consumption, and link dietary restrictions to moral behaviour and spiritual salvation. In this viewpoint, food has a metaphysical—nonmaterial—dimension that can only be realised via religious practice. Food's spiritual component, when correctly ingested, connects us to religious communities and the supernatural.

It's worth emphasising that eating has always been an essential aspect of Jewish culture and history. Cooking and table etiquette are everyday activities that clearly distinguish Jews from their non-Jewish neighbours. Glenda Abramson adds, "Cooking has long been a cultural icon throughout Jewish history" (259). The history of the Jews and their religious code, as well as Jewish food, are all clearly impacted by Jewish culture.

The Israelites were given a complex series of regulations limiting what they could and could not ingest while travelling across the desert. Many scholars believe that these rules were given to the Israelites in order to set them apart from their neighbours, particularly the Philistines. Any animal with cleft hooves that chewed its cud, any fish with fins and scales, and any non-bird-of-prey bird were taught to the Israelites that they could eat. Most insects, pawed creatures, reptiles, and rodents were off-limits despite the lack of a clear explanation for these restrictions, known as kosher regulations, rabbis, and following generations built on them to create a set of dietary requirements that observant Jews follow today.

In her acclaimed recipe novel *Book of Rachel*, Esther David, a well-known Jewish-Gujarathi writer, depicts a Jewish food culture unique to the Bene Israel community to which she belongs, as well as the ethnic identity of this community. In addition to their Shema Israel, a prayer that they recited and sang as part of their faith, they remembered the Jewish dietary requirement. Over time, they intermarried with their Indian Hindu and Muslim neighbours, adopting dietary patterns that blended the best of their neighbours' practices with their own

Jewish ideals. As a result, the BeneIsraelis developed a gastronomy system that redefined their status in the host community.

Methodology

The methodology adopted is analytical and descriptive. The data is collected from primary sources and secondary sources. *Book of Rachel* by Esther David is the primary source and other novels and fiction related to food and literature are used as secondary sources.

Discussion

Book of Rachel- A Literary Treat

The *Book of Rachel* is a celebration of culinary obsessions and the metaphors that come with them. The novel is structured like a recipe, with each chapter beginning with a signature dish and a list of ingredients. This strangely fascinating mode of chapterisation could be motivated by a desire to reinstate the various cuisines of her own community, to highlight the merits of that recipe, or to demonstrate how food served as a connecting thread between the protagonist Rachel and the various characters in the novel. Michael de Creteau defines food as a representation in the following way:

alimentary habits constitute a domain where tradition and innovation matter equally, where past and present are mixed to serve the needs of the hour, to furnish the joy of the moment, and to suit the circumstance. With their high degree of ritualization and their strong affective investment, culinary activities are, for many women of all ages, a place of happiness, pleasure, and discovery. Such life activities demand as much intelligence, imagination, and memory as those traditionally held as superior, such as music and weaving. In this sense, they rightly make up one of the strong aspects of ordinary culture. (*The Practice of Everyday Life: Living and Cooking*, 151)

A deep awareness of food is required for literary interaction with the edible world. As a community's native food culture and consumption standards decrease and are frequently replaced by new, other cultures, migrant food culture is filled with emotional ambivalence. Their cultural ambiguity derives from their recollections and nuances of the location they lived in, as well as their desire to reach their intended motherland. The physical and mental well-being of the migrant population is frequently linked with issues of sanitation and purity, which have influenced their culinary heritage. Food, behaviour, norms, and values become critical nodal points of reference in the formation of a sense of fraternity and belonging.

The author has looked into the state of human ties as a result of a variety of events such as diaspora formation, immigration, forced immigration, refugee camps, religious conversions, and ex-communication. On a personal, familial, community, and national level, the protagonist triumphs over forces that threaten mental and emotional breakdown and estrangement, and her efforts are successful in fighting hatred and biases. Each installment of the story is linked to the recipe from the previous episode. Esther's cooking skills, hospitality, love for her hometown, and confidence in the Prophet Elijah all helped her win her case

against the sale of the old synagogue's grounds, according to the narrative. Every dish and subsequent event are closely intertwined, enhancing the meal or dinner's value in the lives of the participants. According to an essay by Namita Gokhale and MalashriLal,

A distinct South Asian literary identity, drawn from interconnecting languages, culture, Food, music, and oral heritage, is emerging in modern fiction and in social media. It cuts across the boundaries of religion and ideology and stretches the limits of static political maps. (*South Asian Literatures: Beyond Borders, Across Boundaries*, 236-248)

Book of Rachel by Esther David is an excellent example of a literary work in which meals spatialize and re-spatialize the personal and collective memories of a humble Jewish family trying to preserve their historical history. The story begins with the Bene Israeli foods, which are distinctive features of their Jewish culture. Rachel, the heroine of the story, is a member of the Bene-Israeli sect of Jews who leads a solitary existence aided by her culinary skills. Food and the preparation of food as markers of her cultural identity and nostalgia help her to draw existential sustenance amidst the life's experiencing alienations on an emotional, bodily, and spiritual level.

The Bene Israelite Jewish community, often known as the 'Sons of Israel,' is India's largest Jewish population, with roots in the Konkan region before moving to Bombay. According to Edna Fernandez, author of *The Last Jews Of Kerala*, they landed in India during the seventh and sixth century BCE while travelling along the western Konkan coast when their boat became stuck during a storm near Navagaon, some 48 kilometers south of modern-day Mumbai. Only seven ladies and men are claimed to have survived the accident, with the rest drowning in the treacherous Arabian Sea. Navagaon's cemetery was used to bury the few bodies that were discovered. In rural Maharashtra, the seven founding spouses evolved into tens of thousands-strong society.

Every chapter begins with a recipe for a specific Bene Israeli Jewish food, which reveals the family's coded language via Rachel's eyes. When the lone survivor prepares a meal, she reminisces about happier times. The act of preparing food as a cultural and memory marker transforms into a symbolic act of existential reconstruction that is sensory and embodied in quality. In Jewish culture, religion and cuisine have a complicated relationship. There are specific foods that must be prepared on Jewish religious holidays, such as the Sabbath, Passover, Purim, Ab Festival, and weddings. There are additional dietary laws associated with the food that a Jew should consume, known as kosher. The devoted Jew rigorously adheres to kosher and the coded quality of their food culture. Each recipe, in the beginning, is more than just a list of ingredients and methods of preparation; it appears to be strongly tied to the chapter's content. The opening of the *Book of Rachel* is Fried Fish, and it starts thus:

The fish is the symbol of protection because she does not have eyelids and her eyes are always open and watchful, placed on both sides of her head. She is the protector of the home, like the woman of the hose. A fish is portrayed on the ornamental hand sign seen in the Jewish homes, the hamas, for protection and good luck. A fish also signifies fertility because of

the number of eggs she produces and is also linked with the zodiac sign of Pisces. (*Book of Esther*, 1-2)

The fish, according to the Bene Jews is a sign of fortune and luck. It might be because the novel starts with the mention of the fish. The fish is regarded as a protector of humans, and so it has not been provided with eyelids. Likewise, each chapter of the book starts thus. The fish here is compared to a woman who protects and safeguards her home and children. Another literary target that be can be pointed out is the comparison of the fertility of the fish and the woman.

The author begins the third chapter, 'Mutton Curry with Tamarind', with a narrative about Rachel's past and the significance of the tamarind tree in her in-laws' courtyard for her and her husband, Aaron. The ingredients of the cuisine are suggestive in that they appear to be related to the theme of the following chapter. As we advance through the novel's plot, we come across a number of references to recipes. All of the dishes have odd names. She's also been careful not to give her dishes any intriguing or pompous names.

Esther David has blended both culinary and Jewish history, as well as personal recollections, into the characters. Through the narrative, David emphasises the enabling nature of Rachel's recipes, which emerge from a kitchen that is seen as subversive as opposed to the power-driven public arena. Sandra Gilbert defines food's role as a single representational one as follows:

When we focus on Food we focus not just on the literal schedule of meals we all consume but also on the stirrings of memory and desire and joy and, yes, even grief that those meals evoke in us. We stir readers when we add Food because we remind them of their places at the complicated buffet of self, family, culture. Our recipes are histories of who we are, transmitting the tastes of the past through precept and example, even as they suggest how we can sometimes revise our lives by adjusting the menu. (*The Culinary Imagination*, 8)

The aroma of tasty cuisine has the capacity to evoke both involuntary and autobiographical recollections. In the act of tasting, both the conscious and unconscious brains are involved since taste structures the automatic memory. However, the corporeal flavour of food also stimulates a complex network of association memories that emerge from the narrator's unconscious and conscious minds, states Tigner and Carruth. The Book of Rachel brings memories and affection for the past to life via food. Because of his cunning and robust character, Rachel dislikes Mordecai, Aaron's friend, who plays an essential part in the narrative.

Food appears in this chapter as a conveyor of emotion as well as emotional manipulation, as a marker of memory as well as affection. It also appears as a form of coded communication between the producer and the consumer. Food can sometimes be used to simplify and communicate specific information in order to elicit emotional responses. This approach has been used in a variety of literary works from various genres and time periods. The words of Deborah Lupton make clear how emotions can be used for trading a secret and for marketing literature.

The family has also become the chief locus of emotional involvement; family relationships are expected to provide enduring and continuing emotional support. One major emotion that is constantly linked with Food is that of love, particularly maternal love, romantic love, and wifely concern for the wellbeing of one's husband. These emotions are frequently drawn upon in the marketing of food products and in popular accounts of Food. (*Food, the Body and the Self*, 38)

As a result, food becomes not only a sign of remembrance and affection but also a tool for vengeance, enacted with a wish to connect as well as resent. This makes food in the *Book of Rachel* a complicated signifier of a spectrum of emotions, making the novel a rich text not only from the perspective of food studies but also from the perspective of affect studies and thing theory. The forum of communal cooking completes the Jewish culinary culture. With their culinary culture, the diasporic community interacts with each other and disconnects from individuals outside their group. The input of individuals who share a similar background enriches this component of Judaic living, establishing the 'communal' parts of the experience. With these contacts, people collectively extend and restructure their culinary ability to grasp the new environment, making the transition to the new area much easier. Such experiences from their home country have an impact on how community members interact with one another. The opinion of Parasecoli, is that:

Communal practices such as Food preparation, shopping, and celebratory meals simultaneously strengthen a sense of belonging through specific ingredients, dishes, and practices from the migrant's place of origin. These can become sources of emotional ambivalence between the need for comforting Food that echoes the migrant's past and the awareness that the consumption of those same foods might mark them as outsiders in the host society in terms of flavours, smell, and behaviour. (*Food, Identity, and Cultural Reproduction in Immigrant Communities*, 422)

Beyond its nutritional function, food has a social value and significance; it is also expressive. Food is used to discuss and experience many facets of social and cultural life. This is made simple by each culture's methodical organising of food and eating patterns. The analysis of the production and consumption patterns, as well as ordinary experience and verbal expressions regarding food and eating, enable this methodical organising of food. Each civilization establishes what constitutes food, what is permitted to eat, and how and when specific items are consumed. Food rules, for example, define what is intended to be consumed by humans and what can be reasonably expected to be consumed by humans. Foods can be classified as good or terrible, legal or illegal, appropriate or improper, basic or celebratory, ceremonial or symbolic, and so on. Food and culture are inextricably linked.

Summation and Recommendations

Book of Rachel is a novel in which food is inextricably related to the lives of the protagonists. The simple, lucid, and stylish language intertwines the story so as to highlight the relationship between food and literature. It includes a wide range of authentic Bene Israel Jewish dishes, with each chapter beginning with a

delectable recipe. As the story progresses, you gain a better understanding of not only Rachel, but the entire community of Bene Israelis who have lived in India for decades. They have gradually incorporated Indian customs into their own culture, resulting in a lovely fusion. Even though the majority of them have moved away from India, they still have India in their hearts. The narrative vividly captures the Bene Israelis' love for their motherland, which they carry in their hearts even when they are thousands of miles away from India.

The selected novel is rich in food thoughts that must go beyond the surface to negotiate the deeper meanings within. Food isn't just utilised to convey gender roles and sexual characteristics. In many art forms, it serves as a visual metaphor for physical intimacy. It has the ability to portray voluptuousness and sensuality, temptation, desire arousal, as well as culmination and fulfillment. Food is taken for granted in the fiction as a theme, and at the same, it is used to address an issue the author underlines as the plot of the story or else the situation of the community. The food images are tailor-cut in such a way in this novel as to bring out the identity, emotions, and problems of the depicted characters. The author, Esther David has categorised herself as the one who uses food as a metaphorical device as a go-between of the meanings of the food and literature used in writing.

Through the culinary trope, the various strains in the characters' and author's multiple identities are played out, if not resolved, with the goal that it will be disclosed. In the *Book of Rachel*, David employs food and cookery as a central narrative element. The narrative appears to have been cooked and prepared in the same way as food is depicted to be processed — each chapter's storyline corresponds to the protagonist's food preparation. The narrative is seasoned with recipes and pictures created by the author herself, making the text a fascinating mix of genres, much like food is a combination of ingredients and memories. Incorporating the complex and nearly extinct Bene-Israeli recipes into David's work is a way of preserving them in the pages of literature. Literature is said to be a cultural pickle's preservative. Food takes on the role of a synagogue in this context, serving as a symbol of Jewish presence in India. Food is a powerful political tool that allows her to maintain her ethnic identity. Rachel's gastro-memoir establishes food and its preparation as a prominent theme in her family and community.

It's only fitting to end with the concept of the threshold: the mouth works as the threshold of the body as the body of embodied identity - it's no coincidence that food figures prominently in stories about crossing boundaries. The use of language and style is required to spread these concepts. As a result, it can be said that food and literature go hand in hand. The potential of postcolonial food narratives to explore this cultural confluence in the area of migratory food practises and gastro dynamics is much broader. This topic has greater scope for further research in the theme of food literature in the various novels under the criteria, Indian English Writing.

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