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Tasting the South: Culinary Memory, Regional Identity, And Cultural Resistance in Selected Works of Indian English Literature

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Abstract:

South Indian culinary narratives in Indian English literature operate as more than decorative references to meals, spices, or regional dishes. In selected works of Indian English fiction, food becomes a narrative language through which writers articulate regional belonging, caste-consciousness, gendered domestic labour, diasporic nostalgia, and resistance to cultural homogenisation. This paper examines the representation of South Indian foodways in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting*, Amulya Malladi's *The Mango Season*, and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices*. Drawing upon food studies, postcolonial theory, gender studies, and theories of cultural memory, the study argues that South Indian dishes—such as rice, rasam, pickles, coconut-based curries, bananas, spices, and festival foods—function as cultural signs that preserve regional identity while also exposing social hierarchies. The paper demonstrates that kitchens, recipes, meals, and acts of feeding are politically charged spaces in which gender, caste, class, memory, and migration intersect. Ultimately, South Indian culinary narratives reveal that the act of cooking and eating is inseparable from the making of selfhood, community, and cultural resistance.

Keywords: South Indian cuisine, Indian English literature, culinary narratives, food and identity, gender, diaspora, cultural memory, postcolonialism

Introduction

Food occupies a central place in human culture because it is never merely biological sustenance. It carries memories, marks social boundaries, expresses affection, preserves tradition, and reveals structures of power. In Indian English literature, references to food often perform a symbolic function: a meal may indicate class position, a recipe may preserve ancestral memory, a forbidden dish may expose caste prejudice, and a familiar taste may become a sign of homesickness in diaspora.

South Indian food culture is especially significant in this context because it is regionally diverse, deeply ritualised, and closely connected to language, religion, caste, geography, and everyday domestic practice. Rice, lentils, coconut, curry leaves, mustard seeds, tamarind, bananas, pickles, and spices are not simply ingredients; they are cultural markers. A bowl of rasam, a serving of curd rice, a banana-leaf meal, or a jar of homemade pickle can evoke an entire world of family history, regional belonging, and emotional attachment.

This paper examines South Indian culinary narratives in selected works of Indian English literature. The primary texts are:

1. Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*
2. Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting*
3. Amulya Malladi's *The Mango Season*
4. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices*

These texts have been selected because they represent different but interconnected dimensions of South Indian food culture: Kerala Syrian Christian domesticity, the politics of fasting and feeding, Telugu Brahmin diasporic identity, and the magical-realist symbolism of spices. Together, they show that South Indian food in Indian English writing is not a static cultural emblem. Rather, it is a dynamic narrative device through which writers explore identity, memory, gender, caste, migration, and cultural survival.

The central research question is: How do selected Indian English texts represent South Indian culinary practices as expressions of identity, memory, gender, and cultural resistance?

The subsidiary questions are:

- How do food references construct South Indian regional identity?
- How do kitchens and cooking spaces represent gendered labour and female agency?
- How do dishes and food habits reveal caste, class, and social hierarchy?
- How does food function as a memory-object in diasporic South Indian narratives?
- How do culinary images resist cultural homogenisation and colonial or globalised food cultures?

Significance of the Study

Although food studies has become an important interdisciplinary field, much existing criticism on Indian English literature focuses broadly on food, identity, and postcolonialism. There is still scope for focused research on the specifically South Indian dimensions of culinary representation. South Indian food is not homogeneous: Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana possess distinct culinary traditions shaped by local agriculture, religious practices, caste histories, and regional languages.

This study therefore treats South Indian food not as a single cultural category but as a set of living, changing practices. It argues that literary representations of food allow readers to understand South Indian culture through sensory experience—taste, smell, touch, sound, and visual memory—rather than through abstract generalisation.

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II. Review of Literature

i) Food Studies and Literary Criticism:

Food studies has emerged as an interdisciplinary field that examines food in relation to culture, history, anthropology, sociology, gender, ecology, and politics. In literary studies, food imagery is no longer treated as incidental description. Instead, scholars analyse meals, hunger, cooking, fasting, and eating as narrative structures that reveal social relations and psychological states.

Research on food imagery in Indian fiction shows that food often represents acceptance, resistance, cultural preservation, memory, emotion, power, and consumption. A study of *Midnight's Children*, *The God of Small Things*, and *Fasting, Feasting* argues that food metaphors reflect political and social fragmentation, postcolonial hybridity, patriarchal oppression, and repressed desire (East Carolina University, 2015). This confirms that food is a major interpretive key in Indian English fiction.

ii)Food, Identity, and Postcolonialism:

In postcolonial writing, food often becomes a site where cultural identity is negotiated. Colonialism did not only alter political systems; it also transformed food habits, agricultural practices, trade routes, and culinary vocabularies. The circulation of curry, spices, tea, rice, and other food items between India and Europe demonstrates how food histories are tied to empire and cultural exchange.

Recent scholarship observes that culinary identity is central to questions of national belonging, diasporic politics, and marginalisation in Indian political life (Oxford Academic, 2024). In Indian English fiction, food can therefore represent both cultural rootedness and cultural displacement. A character who cooks a traditional dish may be preserving heritage; a character who rejects it may be negotiating modernity, assimilation, or rebellion.

iii)Food, Caste, and Commensality:

In the Indian context, food cannot be separated from caste. Who cooks, who serves, who eats first, who may eat with whom, and what may be eaten are historically regulated by caste norms. The concept of commensality—eating together—therefore becomes politically significant. Shared meals can create community, but food restrictions can also reinforce social exclusion.

Scholarship on South Asia identifies caste and commensality as enduring concerns in food studies (Oxford Bibliographies, 2025). In literature, references to vegetarianism, ritual purity, leftover food, kitchen segregation, and inter-caste dining often reveal unspoken hierarchies. Food thus becomes a silent but powerful language of social discrimination.

iv)Food, Gender, and Domestic Labour:

The kitchen is one of the most gendered spaces in Indian social life. Women are frequently associated with cooking, serving, preserving, and feeding, while men are more often represented as recipients of food and authority within the household. Literary representations of cooking therefore reveal the burden of domestic labour as well as the possibilities of female creativity and agency.

Recent research on Indian women's culinary memoirs shows that food functions as a narrative and mnemonic device through which women reframe domestic spaces and gendered experiences (Atlantis Press, 2020). In fiction, a woman's relationship to food may be oppressive when she is confined to cooking, but empowering when she uses recipes, feeding, or culinary knowledge to assert identity and agency.

v)Food and Diaspora

For diasporic communities, food becomes a portable homeland. Migrants may not be able to carry land, language, or family, but they can carry seeds, spices, recipes, and memories of taste. In diasporic writing, the preparation of South Indian food often becomes an act of cultural preservation.

Research on Amulya Malladi's *The Mango Season* argues that South Indian food links personal and cultural memory while reflecting gender dynamics within Telugu Brahmin society. The protagonist's changing identity is compared to the process of pickling, suggesting that identity is preserved, transformed, and seasoned by experience (Academia.edu, 2013). This demonstrates the value of reading food as a metaphor for diasporic selfhood.

vi)Research Gap

Existing studies have examined food in Indian English literature broadly, but fewer studies focus specifically on South Indian culinary narratives across multiple genres and authorial positions. Many analyses treat "Indian food" as a unified category, overlooking the distinctiveness of South Indian ingredients, rituals, cooking methods, and regional identities. This paper addresses that gap by offering a focused reading of South Indian foodways in four selected texts.

III. Theoretical Framework:

This study uses ideas from food studies, postcolonial theory, feminist criticism, and cultural memory theory. These approaches help us understand why food matters so much in Indian English fiction. Food is not treated as a simple background detail in this research. Instead, it is read as a language through which characters express identity, remember the past, face social pressure, and sometimes resist it.

i)Food Studies

Food studies is the foundation of this research. It looks at food as a cultural practice rather than only as a biological need. What people eat, how they cook, whom they feed, and what they refuse to eat all carry social meaning. A dish can show regional identity, religious belief, class position, or family tradition. A meal can create closeness between people, but it can also reveal distance, hierarchy, or exclusion.

In the Indian context, food is especially meaningful because it is connected with ritual, purity, hospitality, caste, and community. For example, rice may be ordinary food in one sense, but in a South Indian household it can also represent daily life, festival, auspiciousness, and cultural continuity. Similarly, a pickle is not only a preserved food item; it may carry the memory of a mother, a grandmother, a village, or a seasonal ritual.

This study therefore reads food references closely. When a character cooks, serves, fasts, shares food, or longs for a particular dish, the study asks what that act means in the larger story. Food becomes a way of understanding the character's inner life as well as the social world around them.

ii)Postcolonial Theory

Postcolonial theory helps this study understand the relationship between food, history, and power. Colonialism did not only change governments and borders. It also changed trade, agriculture, taste, and eating habits. Indian spices, tea, rice, curry, and pickles travelled across the world through colonial and commercial networks. In the process, Indian food was sometimes admired, sometimes exoticised, and sometimes stereotyped.

Postcolonial theory is useful for reading Indian English fiction because it asks who has the power to define a culture. For many years, Western writers and travellers presented India as a land of spices, mystery, and exotic flavours. Indian English writers often respond to this history by presenting food from within Indian experience. In their novels, food is not an object for outsiders to consume; it is part of family life, memory, labour, and identity.

This approach is particularly important for diasporic writing. When Indian migrants live in Western countries, their food may become a sign of difference. The smell of curry, the use of spices, or the practice of cooking traditional food can attract curiosity, admiration, or racial prejudice. Postcolonial theory helps us see that food is not politically neutral. It can be a source of pride, but it can also become a marker of otherness.

iii)Feminist Literary Criticism:

Feminist criticism is central to this study because food and gender are closely connected in Indian society. In many households, women are expected to cook, serve, preserve, and feed others. This expectation can become a burden when women are denied education, freedom, or recognition for their labour. The kitchen may then represent confinement and inequality.

At the same time, feminist criticism also recognises that cooking can be a source of agency. A woman may express love, creativity, authority, and cultural knowledge through food. A recipe passed from mother to daughter can preserve a woman's voice even when she has little public power. A mother's ability to feed her family may give her influence within the household. In diasporic families, women often become the keepers of culinary tradition, using food to keep home alive in a new country.

This study therefore does not see women's relationship with food in a simple way. Cooking can oppress, but it can also empower. A woman may be trapped in the kitchen, yet she may also use the kitchen to protect memory, nurture relationships, and challenge silence. The selected novels show both sides of this experience.

iv)Cultural Memory Theory:

Cultural memory theory explains how communities remember the past through objects, rituals, stories, and everyday practices. Food is one of the strongest memory-objects because it is experienced through the body. We taste it, smell it, touch it, and share it. Because of this, food can bring back the past more powerfully than words.

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A familiar dish may remind a character of childhood, a parent, a festival, or a lost home. In diasporic writing, this becomes especially important. Migrants may be far from their homeland, but they can still cook familiar food. Spices, pickles, rice, and traditional recipes help them maintain a connection with their roots. Food becomes a portable form of home.

This study uses cultural memory theory to examine how food preserves personal and collective history. In the selected novels, food is often connected with family memory, childhood, loss, and longing. A character's longing for a particular taste may reveal a deeper longing for belonging, security, or love.

How These Theories Work Together

These four approaches do not work separately in this study. They support one another. Food studies helps us see food as meaningful. Postcolonial theory helps us understand food in relation to history, empire, migration, and cultural identity. Feminist criticism helps us examine the gendered nature of cooking and domestic labour. Cultural memory theory helps us understand why food carries such emotional power.

Together, these theories allow the study to read South Indian culinary narratives in a layered way. A simple reference to a pickle, for instance, can be read as a regional food item, a symbol of women's labour, a memory of home, and a sign of cultural survival in diaspora. This layered reading is necessary because food in Indian English fiction rarely has only one meaning.

IV. Methodology

This study follows a qualitative and text-based method of research. Its main purpose is to closely read selected works of Indian English fiction and examine how they represent South Indian food, cooking, meals, hunger, and culinary memory. Since the study deals with literary texts, it does not use surveys, interviews, or statistical analysis. Instead, it depends on careful reading, interpretation, and comparison.

Primary Texts:

The following four novels are the primary texts of this study:

1. Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*
2. Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting*
3. Amulya Malladi's *The Mango Season*
4. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices*

These novels were selected because they represent different aspects of South Indian culinary experience. Roy's novel is rooted in Kerala and presents food within a world of caste, family, memory, and trauma. Desai's novel examines hunger, fasting, service, and gender inequality through the contrast between Indian and American food cultures. Malladi's novel explores Telugu Brahmin identity, diaspora, and women's negotiation with tradition. Divakaruni's novel uses spices in a magical-realist way to discuss migration, healing, and cultural memory.

Together, these texts allow the study to look at South Indian culinary narratives from more than one angle. They include regional domestic life, gendered food practices, diasporic nostalgia, and magical representations of spices. This variety makes the comparison meaningful.

Secondary Sources:

The study also uses secondary sources such as scholarly articles, books, dissertations, and critical essays on food studies, Indian English literature, postcolonialism, gender studies, caste studies, and diaspora studies. These sources help place the primary texts within a larger academic conversation. They also help the study avoid treating food references in isolation from their social and historical context.

Method of Textual Analysis:

The main method used in this study is close reading. Close reading means paying careful attention to the words, images, scenes, and symbols used by the writer. In this research, close reading is applied especially to passages that mention food, cooking, kitchens, spices, meals, hunger, fasting, pickles, mangoes, and acts of feeding.

The analysis is carried out in three stages.

First, the study identifies food references in each novel. This includes direct references to dishes and ingredients as well as indirect references such as hunger, smell, taste, cooking sounds, kitchen spaces, and food-related rituals. Even a small detail, such as the smell of curry leaves or the sight of a jar of pickle, is treated as significant.

Second, these references are placed in their context. The study asks where the food reference appears in the novel, which character is involved, and what is happening in the story at that moment. For example, a meal shared during a happy family occasion may mean something different from a meal eaten in loneliness or conflict. The same food item can carry different meanings depending on the situation.

Third, the study interprets the meaning of these food references. This is done by connecting them to the larger themes of the research: identity, memory, gender, caste, class, diaspora, and resistance. The aim is not simply to list food items found in the novels. The aim is to understand what those food items do in the narrative.

Analytical Categories:

To make the analysis systematic, the study uses the following categories:

- Food and regional identity: How dishes, ingredients, and eating habits create a sense of South Indian belonging.
- Food and memory: How taste, smell, and cooking recall childhood, family, home, and the past.
- Food and gender: How cooking, serving, fasting, and feeding reflect women's roles, domestic labour, and female agency.
- Food and caste or class: How food practices reveal social hierarchy, exclusion, purity, and inequality.
- Food and diaspora: How migrants use food to preserve cultural identity and negotiate life in a new country.

- Food and resistance: How characters use culinary knowledge, recipes, sharing, and preservation to challenge social pressure or cultural loss.

These categories are not rigid compartments. In many scenes, more than one category may apply. For instance, a woman making pickle in a diasporic household may simultaneously represent regional identity, gendered labour, cultural memory, and resistance to assimilation. The study therefore allows these categories to overlap.

Comparative Approach

Although each novel is analysed separately, the study also uses a comparative approach. It compares how different writers use food to discuss similar concerns. For example, Roy and Desai both show the darker side of domestic food culture, but Roy focuses more on caste and family trauma, while Desai focuses more on gendered hunger and deprivation. Malladi and Divakaruni both write about diaspora, but Malladi presents food through realistic family relationships, while Divakaruni uses magical realism.

This comparison helps the study identify common patterns as well as important differences. It shows that South Indian culinary narratives are not uniform. Different writers use food to explore different social and emotional realities.

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to four selected novels. It does not claim to represent all South Indian culinary narratives in Indian English literature. There are many other writers and texts that could be studied, including works by Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, and Malayali writers, as well as Dalit and regional-language writings in translation.

The study also focuses mainly on fiction. It does not examine food writing, cookbooks, memoirs, poetry, or films in detail, although some of these may be referred to in the review of literature. Furthermore, the study reads food through literary and cultural interpretation. It does not attempt a nutritional, anthropological, or historical survey of South Indian cuisine.

Despite these limitations, the selected texts provide a strong foundation for understanding how South Indian food functions in Indian English literature. They represent different regions, communities, genres, and experiences, making the study both focused and wide-ranging.

V. South Indian Food as Cultural Text:

South Indian cuisine is commonly associated with rice, lentils, coconut, tamarind, curry leaves, mustard seeds, dried red chillies, bananas, and spices. However, it is important not to reduce it to a fixed list of dishes. South Indian food culture includes Tamil, Malayali, Kannada, Telugu, Tulu, Anglo-Indian, Muslim, Christian, Dalit, tribal, and regional variations.

In literature, food becomes cultural text because it communicates meanings that characters may not state directly. A meal can express love without words. A refused dish can indicate social rejection. A remembered taste can reveal displacement. A kitchen can become a space of both oppression and creativity.

The sensory quality of food makes it particularly effective in fiction. Readers do not merely learn that a character eats; they imagine the smell of curry leaves in hot oil, the sourness of tamarind, the heat of chillies, the softness of rice, or the sweetness of a ripe mango. Such sensory details create cultural intimacy and emotional depth.

VI. Culinary Memory in *The God of Small Things:*

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* is set in Ayemenem, Kerala, and presents food as deeply connected to family history, caste, sexuality, and trauma. The novel's culinary world is shaped by Syrian Christian household practices, Kerala's local ingredients, and the rigid social order of postcolonial India.

Food in the novel frequently marks social boundaries. The treatment of Velutha, a Dalit man, reveals how caste operates through everyday practices, including touch, service, and proximity. Food becomes part of this system of exclusion because who prepares, serves, touches, and consumes food carries social meaning.

The novel also uses food to represent childhood memory and emotional intensity. The children's world is filled with sensory experiences: jams, pickles, sweets, insects, fruits, and the physical environment of Kerala. These details create a vivid childhood landscape, but they are also shadowed by violence and loss. Food is therefore associated with both pleasure and danger.

One of the most important culinary symbols in the novel is the pickle factory. Pickles require preservation, transformation, and time. In a symbolic sense, the family's memories are also pickled: preserved in jars, exposed to bitterness, and transformed by grief. The factory becomes a metaphor for a household attempting to contain its past, even though trauma continues to leak into the present.Roy's culinary narrative therefore shows that South Indian food is not only comforting. It can also be unsettling. The same food culture that offers familiarity and belonging can expose caste prejudice, patriarchal control, and family dysfunction.

VII. Hunger, Feasting, and Gender in *Fasting, Feasting:*

Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* presents food as a central metaphor for gender, family, and cultural difference. The novel is divided into two parts: the first focuses on Uma's life in an Indian household, while the second follows her brother Arun's experience in the United States.

In the Indian section, Uma is associated with service, sacrifice, and denial. She is expected to care for others, obey her parents, and remain within the domestic sphere. Her life is structured by fasting, duty, and emotional hunger. Food becomes a metaphor for what she is denied: education, freedom, marriage, self-expression, and personal fulfilment.

The title itself establishes the central opposition between fasting and feasting. Fasting represents deprivation, discipline, and female sacrifice. Feasting represents

consumption, privilege, and social display. Yet Desai complicates this opposition. Feasting is not always liberating, and fasting is not always spiritually meaningful. Both can become forms of control.

The Indian household's food practices reveal patriarchal structures. Women prepare food, serve men, and manage domestic rituals, but they do not necessarily enjoy equal access to pleasure or authority. Uma's relationship to food reflects her position in the family: she feeds others but remains emotionally and socially unfed.

In the American section, Arun encounters a different food culture marked by abundance, dieting, consumption, and anxiety. Desai contrasts Indian domestic food culture with American consumer culture, but she does not idealise either. Both societies use food to regulate bodies and behaviour.

Thus, *Fasting, Feasting* demonstrates that culinary narratives can expose gendered power relations across cultures. Food is not merely a marker of national identity; it is also a system through which families discipline desire, hunger, and female agency.

VIII. Pickles, Mangoes, and Diasporic Identity in *The Mango Season:*

Amulya Malladi's *The Mango Season* offers one of the clearest examples of South Indian culinary narrative in diasporic Indian English fiction. The novel follows Priya, a Telugu Brahmin woman living in the United States, who returns to India and becomes involved in family expectations regarding marriage, tradition, and gender roles.

Food in the novel is strongly connected to South Indian domestic culture. Mangoes, pickles, spices, rice, and traditional dishes evoke the sensory world of the Telugu household. These foods are not simply regional products; they carry emotional associations of home, childhood, motherhood, and cultural belonging.

The pickle is especially significant. Pickling is a domestic practice traditionally associated with women, seasonal knowledge, patience, and preservation. In the novel, the process of pickling becomes a metaphor for Priya's identity formation. Like a pickle, her identity is shaped by time, pressure, spice, and preservation. She carries her South Indian heritage with her, but that heritage is also transformed by her diasporic experience.

The novel shows that diasporic identity is not a simple choice between Indian tradition and Western modernity. Priya does not completely reject her cultural background, nor does she uncritically accept patriarchal expectations. Food becomes the medium through which she negotiates this tension. Preparing or remembering traditional food allows her to remain connected to her roots, while questioning gender norms allows her to reshape those roots.

The kitchen in *The Mango Season* is therefore a complex space. It is associated with female labour and family expectation, but it is also a place where women transmit culture, preserve memory, and exercise quiet authority. The novel suggests that culinary tradition can be both restrictive and empowering.

IX. Spices, Magic, and Female Agency in *The Mistress of Spices:*

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices* uses food and spices in a magical-realist mode. The protagonist, Tilo, is a woman with the power to understand human suffering through spices. She runs a spice shop in Oakland, California, where spices become instruments of healing, memory, desire, and cultural connection.

The novel transforms spices from culinary ingredients into narrative agents. Each spice carries a personality, history, and power. This technique reflects the importance of spices in Indian history, trade, colonialism, and domestic culture. Spices are not neutral commodities; they are connected to empire, migration, exoticisation, and cultural exchange.

For the diasporic characters in the novel, spices provide a link to India. They evoke memories of home, family, and childhood. At the same time, the spice shop becomes a multicultural space where Indian, Mexican, African American, and other communities encounter one another. Food therefore becomes a bridge across cultural difference.
Tilo's relationship with spices also raises questions about female agency. She uses culinary knowledge to help others, but she is also bound by the rules of her magical calling. Her eventual choice to embrace human love and limitation represents a movement from abstract spiritual power toward embodied human experience.

The novel suggests that food and spices can resist cultural erasure. In a diasporic setting, where migrants may feel disconnected from their origins, the smell and taste of familiar spices restore cultural memory. Yet Divakaruni also warns against treating Indian culture as fixed or exotic. Spices change meaning when they travel, just as identities change when people migrate.

X. Food, Caste, and Social Hierarchy:

Across the selected texts, food reveals social hierarchy. In *The God of Small Things*, caste determines who may be touched, loved, served, or excluded. In *Fasting, Feasting*, class and gender determine who eats, who serves, and who is denied. In *The Mango Season*, Brahmin food culture shapes family expectations and gender norms. In *The Mistress of Spices*, food connects marginalised diasporic communities but also reflects the politics of cultural representation.

South Indian food practices often carry ritual meanings. Vegetarianism, fasting, purity, festival foods, and offerings to deities are shaped by religious and caste traditions. Literature can expose how these practices create belonging for some groups while excluding others.

A critical culinary reading must therefore avoid romanticising food. While food can represent love, home, and continuity, it can also reproduce discrimination. The kitchen may nurture family life, but it may also confine women. A traditional meal may preserve culture, but it may also enforce patriarchal or caste-based expectations.

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XI. Food as Resistance:

Despite its association with domestic labour and social control, food also becomes a tool of resistance in these texts. Characters resist through cooking, feeding, preserving, sharing, and remembering.

In *The Mango Season*, Priya's connection to South Indian food allows her to retain cultural identity while challenging imposed marriage norms. In *The Mistress of Spices*, Tilo uses spices to heal and empower marginalised people. In *The God of Small Things*, small acts of sharing, touching, and loving across caste boundaries challenge social rules. In *Fasting, Feasting*, Uma's quiet endurance and her awareness of deprivation become forms of resistance, even if they do not lead to dramatic liberation.

Food resistance is often subtle. It may not appear as political protest. It may take the form of cooking a forbidden dish, feeding someone considered socially inferior, preserving a family recipe, or refusing to abandon a cultural practice. Such acts show that everyday domestic life can be politically meaningful.

XII. Findings:

The study leads to the following findings:

1. South Indian food functions as a marker of regional identity. Rice, coconut, tamarind, curry leaves, mangoes, pickles, and spices evoke a specifically South Indian sensory world.
2. Food preserves cultural memory. Dishes and ingredients recall childhood, family, festivals, and homeland, especially in diasporic narratives.
3. The kitchen is a gendered space. Women are often associated with cooking and feeding, which reveals both domestic burden and female agency.
4. Food exposes caste and class hierarchies. Who cooks, serves, eats, and shares food reveals social power relations.
5. Culinary traditions are dynamic. South Indian food is not represented as fixed tradition; it changes through migration, modernity, and cross-cultural contact.
6. Food becomes a form of resistance. Characters use culinary knowledge, recipes, and acts of feeding to preserve identity and challenge social constraints.

XIII. Conclusion:

South Indian culinary narratives in Indian English literature demonstrate that food is a powerful literary language. In the selected works, dishes, spices, kitchens, meals, and acts of feeding represent identity, memory, gender, caste, diaspora, and resistance. South Indian food is not treated as exotic background; it becomes central to the emotional and political structure of the narratives.

Roy shows how food and domestic spaces are entangled with caste, trauma, and memory. Desai uses fasting and feasting to critique gendered deprivation and cultural control. Malladi presents food as a means of preserving Telugu Brahmin identity in diaspora

while questioning patriarchal tradition. Divakaruni transforms spices into symbols of healing, migration, and female agency.

Together, these texts show that South Indian culinary culture is both rooted and mobile. It is rooted in regional ingredients, rituals, and family traditions, but it also travels through migration, memory, and storytelling. The literary kitchen, therefore, is not merely a place where food is prepared. It is a space where culture is remembered, identity is negotiated, and resistance is quietly cooked.

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