CHAPTER FOUR

THE POLITICS OF FOOD IN THE DOMESTIC REALM: RESTRICTIONS AND RESISTANCES

Introduction

In our daily lives, food politics becomes most visible in the realm of the kitchen, in the menu of the dining table, and through the portions on the plate. In the act of eating, we engage in a corporeal transaction with the world, as the politics of the world enters the privacy of our bodies, through the vehicle of food. Eating, as Tompkins suggests in *Racial Indigestion*, also involves the "metonymic of the struggle for political agency" (9). Food politics is evident in the groceries bought from the market as they represent the social construction of caste and the prescriptions or proscriptions, that govern the items that can be allowed at the dining table. Additionally, our relation to food is intensely gendered, and therefore political. While serving food, women keep in mind that the males of the household receive preferential treatment, while they themselves have to be content with inferior or leftover portions. Similarly, cooking is also charged with a political underpinning and can reveal the cook's weakness or aggression or aid in their freedom or nourishment. The space of the kitchen, being the primary site for food preparation, is witness to the various battles enacted therein, that may subjugate or empower the workers of the kitchen. Gender dichotomy is also visible in the exercise of cooking. For instance, in all the novels selected for this study, it is observed that women are depicted as the unpaid providers of domestic services, which differentiate them from the men who are paid for their work in the kitchen. The cook in R.K. Narayan's *The Dark Room* or the cook and his son Biju in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*, Musa and Saleem in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, can be seen as typical examples of men working in the kitchen. Due to the patriarchal heritage of our society, it is observed that men's cooking is perceived as something special, formal, and therefore deserving of payment and commendation. Additionally, these men are also wary of women in and around their workplace, as they seem to consider feminine presence as threats to their positions. What can be a better example to demonstrate the case than Salman Rushdie's character Saleem Sinai who vilifies the women in his life to the point of demonising them? Men's misogynist perception of women cooks would be taken up in the later part of the chapter, with reference to Rushdie's novel. Denied a proper representation, women often voice their

issues through the culinary realm which bring forth various issues like that of power, powerlessness, restrictions and resistances, as will be discussed shortly. Overall, the politics surrounding food is a never-ending process where all of the society, irrespective of place, time and culture, are involved. To illustrate the same, this chapter would study Easterine Kire's *A Terrible Matriarchy*, Kiran Desai's *Hullaballoo in the Guava Orchard*, Bama's *Sangati: Events* and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. While relating to food, this chapter would basically focus on family politics as present in gender discrimination and social politics as can be seen in class discrimination, in the Indian context. The chapter would examine how food generates the politics of dietary discrimination through gender and class; the politics involved in the kitchen during the multiple stages of food preparation, the politics of body policing, and also, sexual politics. By doing so, this chapter seeks to problematise the assumed gender and class discriminations, in order to understand the daily politics involved in our meals. An important approach towards this understanding would be provided by Foucault's idea of biopolitics, attending both to its advantages and shortcomings.

Chad Lavin in *Eating Anxiety* suggests that, food generates a greater understanding of politics as "it freely and regularly transgresses the border that supposedly separates the public and the private" (xix). Being a politically loaded element, food ensures that the places and the bodies involved in its production and consumption, such as the pastoral fields, the markets and supermarkets, the public and private kitchens, the dining tables, the diners as well as the dieters, are perpetually charged with political overtones, stemming from personal and communal beliefs. In a similar vein, Kyla Wazana Tompkins in the book *Racial Indigestion*, examines how the act of consumption fuses the elements of the biological with the social, to cultivate political subjects and gendered bodies, that further perpetuate racist ideologies, as witnessed in the literary and cultural representation of the US in the 19th century (1).

Tompkins's study provides argumentative impetus for this chapter in relation to the space of the kitchen, which she sees as "sites of utopic possibilities" as well as "dystopic spaces", that equally provide chances for class inversion and the representation of the repressed (10). Besides, the kitchen has long been studied as a third space which doesn't necessarily conform to the traditional strictures of food culture, as it can also be a space of liberation while equally being a space that generates gender discrimination. It has

been observed that the kitchen is a space of power, hegemony, restrictions, and victimisation, while concurrently being a space of resistance, revival, liberation, and publicity. Most importantly, the kitchen provides an outlet to express oneself, and obviously, the emotions of the workers seep into the multiple chores of preparing food. It is then transferred to the dining table, to be devoured and thus easily connecting to the eater in the most corporeal form imaginable. Thus, the kitchen as a space lies at the intersection of a set of binaries, such as the raw and the cooked (as theorised by Lévi-Strauss), the natural and the cultural, the empowered and the marginalised, the food-worker and the consumer. This is why kitchen dynamics remains a popular area in several works of fiction, and thereby also becomes an interesting area for scholarly investigation.

Gender in the Household

To begin with, it is imperative to note that there are various ways by which gender and class discrimination is precipitated through the quotidian dynamics of the kitchen. Women's work in the kitchen are often trivialised as something they are naturally supposed to do. Making domestic work visible and valued, has been one of the agenda of the second wave of feminism, that brought domestic work and reproduction to the centre of political debate. Domestic work got official recognition in Arlene Kaplan Daniel's 1987 essay entitled "Invisible Work", where she asserts that unpaid housework and voluntary work are socially undervalued and therefore remains "invisible". Erin Hatton developing on Daniel's critique further identifies three intersectant sociological processes that render some kinds of work as invisible, namely, the "cultural, legal and spatial mechanisms of invisibility" (1). Briefly speaking, she derives that such labour can be neglected due to "hegemonic cultural ideologies", exclusion from "legal definitions of 'employment'" and also due to its physical distance from "a culturally defined worksite" (2). These are some major factors that contribute towards domestic work remaining invisible. In another revolutionary attempt, Silvia Federici's book *Revolution at Point Zero* (2012) relates domestic work and reproduction to capitalism, and argues how such unpaid and almost invisible labour is at "the foundation of every economic and political system" (2), as it contributes to the reproduction of human workforce. A collection of over thirty years of research on housework, social reproduction, and women's struggles, the book asserts that housework is an ideological arena through which women are exploited in a capitalistic society. Federici locates the struggle for social power in the figure of the proletariat

housewife as she is victimised by the capitalist ideologies that has designated housework as women's natural task, and thus conveniently excluded it from the wage system. Other workers who are excluded from the wage relation include "slaves, colonial subjects, prisoners, housewives, and students" (8).

Federici and other feminists identify the kitchen, the bedroom and the home as the "centers for the production of labor-power" (8). Federici took an active part in the campaign for wages for housework, that started in 1972 in Padua, seeking to gain the state's recognition for housework, as "an activity that should be remunerated as it contributes to the production of the labor force and produces capital, thus enabling every other form of production to take place" (8). The movement derived that for capital profits some labourious activities were bound to remain unwaged (9). Additionally, gender discrimination has ensured that women continue to drudge in the house, and even more so in the kitchen. The lack of a political viewpoint deprives many women from understanding how they are entangled in an unpaid domestic work structure that profits a capitalist society by exploiting them. She asserts that unwaged housework is one of the "subtlest violence" of capitalism against working class, and especially for domestic workers it is no less than the "prostitution of body and mind" (16). In order to maintain capital profit housework has been transformed into a natural attribute of women, and thus the daily labour put into it became invisible (16). On the other hand, demanding wages is revolutionary since it stages a struggle against women's social role, and make them and their work visible (18).

Federici throws some thoughtful questions at a time when the role/politics of gender in the household was only beginning to garner critical attention. In many households, the kitchen remains a place continually fraught with tension between femininity and masculinity. As the kitchen remains "the heart of the sacred geography of home" (K. Ray 117), it makes sense that the dynamics of the kitchen be examined. Even a superficial examination of the household or the kitchen unsettles the notion of it being a private space. Researching on the cultural geographies of home, Alison Blunt suggests that, "the home itself is intensely political, both in its internal intimacies and through its interfaces with the wider world" (510). When the illusory notion of the home being a private space is unsettled, the question arises of how women are solely burdened with the responsibility of creating and sustaining the household. It should be noted that both sexism and capitalism, as suggested by hooks and Federici, respectively, are the two prevalent

tools that naturalise the unjust division of domestic responsibility. As charity begins at home, so does the groundwork of gender discrimination. As Krishnendu Ray notes, even our perception of others is "dependent on our conceptions of their gendered roles in the making of the household" (115). Therefore, as a space where gender and the performances around it are continually constructed as well as constricted, the home becomes a centre of contention.

Sally Cline in her study of the political dynamics of food, rightly suggests that, "women's total relationship to food can be viewed as a striking cultural comment", since "food has become a symbol of women's emotional needs, a rhetoric of protest as well as a language of joy and anguish" (4, 5). Women have been variously described as the "gatekeepers" of food, a term coined by Kurt Lewin in 1943, to describe women's role in food provisioning in the domestic context (Lewin 37). Although Lewin remarks about the obligation of women in this area as a positive thing, it is as McIntosh and Zey suggest, "*Responsibility* is not equivalent to *control*" (318). By dint of this very responsibility, women are subjugated to their roles as food providers, while the ability to control the eaters might not be universal. It is as Sally Cline suggests, "Women's subordination is locked into food" (3), even though they are the "channels" (Lewin 37) through which meals arrive at the table.

But current research in this area has proved that such a view is only partially true, and that food can relate to the performances of gender and the distribution of power in a more nuanced manner (Meah 4). It has also been established that the concepts of masculinities and femininities are fluid rather than fixed and impenetrable, and are therefore prone to slippages (Julier and Lindenfeld 10; Meah 16). When gender itself is so fluid, it cannot be surprising that the acts of cooking and eating can augment the representations of gender. Alternatively, as hooks suggests, the home could also be a place where one could resist to be objects of dominance or of ridicule, and strive to be dignified subjects (78). Generalising hooks's statement it can be said that every home is endowed with a "radical political dimension", even if its structural arrangements often lead to the reinforcement of inequality (78). According to Dr Angela Meah, the study of domestic cooking spaces reveals that gender and power are components of each other and that gender is one of the "modalities" through which power operates (15).

Operation of Power in the Domestic Sphere

Akin to the fluid concepts of masculinities and femininities, the flow of power in domestic spheres is not unidirectional, but, "diverse, diffuse, dynamic and contingent" (Meah 16). Any study of space, gender, and food, should therefore attend to the complex relations between power and subjectivity. In understanding the operative mechanisms of power, Foucault's ideas on biopower yielded numerous theoretical developments. As discussed in Chapter One, Foucault conceptualised biopower as the political control of humans through a set of tailored categories as a means to regulate and optimise the biopolitical life of the nation (Foucault, *History*, 139). His ideas generated discussions on the way power influences human relations, gendered identities, as well as quotidian spaces, developing all of them as sites of political intensity.

In his book *Discipline and Punish*, which explores the birth of the modern penal system, Foucault traces the way purely instrumental principle controls the body to derive utmost economical profit or utility. His chapter "Docile Bodies" is of special interest in this chapter, as it facilitates one's understanding of the way power functions in the social context. Foucault analyses the figure of the soldier who could be recognised by his bold and honourable demeanour in the early seventeenth century, but by the late eighteenth century has turned into an ideal figure of discipline and docility. He notes how, "in the early seventeenth century … the soldier was someone who could be recognised from afar; he bore certain signs: the natural signs of his strength and his courage, the marks, too, of his pride; his body was the blazon of his strength and valour" (*Discipline,* 135). Similar to the figure of the soldier, one can identify the figure of the housewife, who is expected to bear certain signs of domesticity, such as patience, servitude, gratitude, maternal compassion, and also wifely attractiveness. While the soldier's body is "the blazon of his strength and valour", the housewife's body is the emblem of fertility and nurturance. If read correctly, Foucault's ideas on the disciplinary practices of army, school, hospital, prison, industry, can also be applied to the intricacies of the household. Considered in relation to food, one can observe how the kitchen in its operation, is similar to each of the dictating institutions, mentioned by Foucault. However, in this case, the operation of power is quite subdued.

With the discovery of the body as "object and target of power" (*Discipline,* 136), disciplinary institutions began to invest in the body in a politically detailed manner. This

detailed attention to the body helped in creating a strong knowledge base of the political technology of the body. It devised the subtle art of coercion that tried to manipulate the elements, gestures, and behaviours of the body in a calculated and precise manner, so as to discipline it (*Discipline,* 138). This calculated idea of control, which Foucault calls the "'microphysics' of power", increased the economic usefulness of the body, while the principles of discipline made it docile, and its domination easier (*Discipline*, 139, 138). As he observes: "it defined how one may have a hold over others' bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines" (*Discipline,* 138).

It is also interesting to note how subjection is not only limited to the use of violence, terror, strategy, or ideology, but can be ensured through subtle ways provided by the knowledge of the body's political technology. Foucault's idea of the "microphysics of power", illuminates how bodies attain docility at its most basic level, through the act of eating. We are made docile by the very act of our consumption as dictated by our dietary regulations, which itself is largely influenced by social coercion, and is mostly a part of social knowledge. It would not be an exaggeration therefore, to say that food is also a component of the "mechanics of power", as it constantly enters the body, exploring, breaking, and re-arranging the political anatomy of the consumer's body (*Discipline,*138). This idea would be further explained with reference to the selected novels, in the later part of this chapter.

Sandra Lee Bartky in the book *Femininity and Domination* talks about the various types of subjection that the feminine body is prone to, and accuses Foucault of being blind to "those disciplines that produce a modality of embodiment that is peculiarly feminine" (Bartky 65). She is correct in her assertations as it is plainly evident that females are brought up with the expectation to perform domestic chores with mechanical precision. Like Foucault's student, soldier, patient, or factory worker, the women of the household are rigidly controlled by the numerous domestic tasks that require their time to be divided and segmented. The control of women through the operation of the household is thus no less than the running of the economy. Foucault's shortcoming lies in the fact that he not only ignores the feminine modality of embodiment and its different types of subjection, but also fails to consider the political arena of the household and the kitchen.

Like Foucault's idea of disciplinary society, that he illustrates with the concept of Jeremy Bentham's panopticon, the household can also be seen as a disciplinary microsociety, most evident in the operation of kitchen politics. Although the panopticon is absent, there is a constant sense of surveillance and the permanency of visibility within the apparent privacy of the household. In Indian households, it is mostly the mothers-in-law who undertake the role of domestic supervisor, and in certain instances, their position and function can be compared to that of the supervisor of the panopticon. Some apparent examples are that of 'Grandmother' in Easterine Kire's narrative, and Reverend Mother in Rushdie's narrative, who overlook and control the rest of the inhabitants of the household. It is also equally true that even without supervisors, the inmate and even the household members, live in "a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (Foucault, *Discipline,* 201). Foucault is correct in assessing that "a state of conscious and permanent visibility" permeates the very structure of society, making one constantly observe self-surveillance. However, there are also cases where women resist such constricting principles, and even showcase their culinary skills instead of cowering in fear. Kulfi with her routine culinary exhibition in Kiran Desai's narrative, is a prime example of this particular aspect. Considering the domestic area of the home and the kitchen in respect to Foucault's ideas on power, embodiment, and discipline, would reveal how patriarchal values and gendered embodiment marks its hold upon the female as well as the male body, as both the sexes are expected to perform their respective gender roles since their childhood.

As explained so far, the theory of docile bodies takes a critical turn when one engages it with the concerns of femininity and domesticity. According to Amigot and Pujal, the engagement of feminism with Foucauldian ideas revealed that the mechanism of gender is always organised within the system of power; and that gender itself is "an apparatus of power", that although diverse in its interactions, does seem to specifically subordinate women (647). A major criticism against Foucault is his disregard for gender in his exploration of the body. He is accused of "gender blindness" and sexism, as he simply understands the body as a "docile" and disciplined abstraction, or as McNay says, "a passive entity, upon which power stamps its own images" (McNay 33,12). Foucault builds his critique upon a supposedly neutral body which eventually suggests that it is indeed a masculine body (Amigot and Pujal 657). Also, in constructing bodies as passive, women are stripped off of the urge to question and rectify their lives. McNay and other

feminists talk about the way women are socialised, by sexing their bodies. Although our embodied experiences are fundamental in the construction of gender identities, the process is never straightforward. Rather, it is dynamic and is subject to multiple criteria, such as the different societal treatment accorded to men and women (McNay 24). As such, Foucault's short-sighted conception has reduced the depth of his work in terms of gender, as his thesis fails to understand the totality of gendered disciplinary techniques and gendered experiences. Attending to the dangers of his oversight, Toril Moi states that, "The price for giving in to his powerful discourse, is nothing less than the depoliticisation of feminism" (95).

Many critics, feminist or otherwise, have also underlined the shortcomings of Foucault's approach to power, suggesting the need to examine the tension between the authority and the subject, and the resistance staged against it (Amigot and Pujal 648). For instance, in Foucault's conception, the body is rendered docile and incapable to resist the flow of power or enact against it. Although Foucault talks in favour of the material body, his concept of power overshadows the oppositional force that may be exercised by the material body. Instead, Foucault presents the idea of hysterisation, as a pathological construct that seeks to control women in terms of their sexuality. As a result, "The female body appears as a strategic space, devoid of biopower and subject to a process of progressive objectification and control on the part of medical and psychological discourses" (Amigot and Pujal 648). However, the contention of feminism suggests that the female body is not devoid of biopower, but rather politically charged with the principles of liberalism and sovereignty. Thus, a critical assessment of the definition of power calls one's attention towards the different flows of power exercised by— the local and global societies, the domestic microsociety of home, the institutions of law, and the realm knowledge, as well as the resistances staged against power— the absence of which makes power in Foucault, "a unidirectional monolithic force" (McNay 40).

Politicising the Mundane: Eating and Resisting

In order to examine the gendered experiences in their totality, it is necessary to politicise the everyday life and its mundane activities, reevaluate hegemonic control, and study the way the dominated subjects might resist and subvert it. Food is a comprehensive arena, where we can study the construction of the self as influenced by the ideas of resistance, subversion, and liberation, within the cultural practice of gender and class discrimination.

In the Indian context, food acts as a dynamic medium through which gender inequality and caste discrimination regularly operate. The symbolism of eating and other dietary practices takes a critical turn when we consider the influence of nation and culture over it. In *Racial Indigestion*, Tompkins argues that the study of the eating mouth is important because the mouth acts as a "“dense transfer point of power” in the production of the biopolitical life of the nation" (185). This is because in the act of eating we engage in a corporeal transaction with the world, as the politics of the world enters the privacy of our bodies, through the vehicle of food, which itself is always and already governed by socio-politics and economics. Tompkins also asserts that, "eating has a messy and promising history to tell about the dialectical struggles between pleasure and disgust, affect and aesthetics, dominance and resistance, and the interpenetrations of all of the above" (185). The validity of her assertation is evident. For instance, even our food choices are gendered, as the choices itself are products of our cultural seasoning. Similarly, cooking can reveal vulnerability as well as aggression, and is evidently charged with a political underpinning. Therefore, it can be said that the dialectical struggles which Tompkins talks about, is not only limited to eating, but is equally true for cooking, and related food work.

The concept of biopolitics attends a peculiar complexity when examined in relation to food. In her study of the antebellum period of the United States, Tompkins analyses some local movements to derive that biopolitics, instead of only being limited to Foucault's conception, is also exercised as a "collective ideological effort" that revise republicanism, "to construe the ideal citizen as self-policing, temperate, and moral" (5-6). Similarly, Chad Lavin's *Eating Anxiety* talks of the development of dietary discourses that promoted the self-control of weight as a part of healthy lifestyle. The ideas of body policing were commercialised, being as they were, yet another facet of unabashed capitalism. With the proliferation of weight loss programmes, diet books, self-help groups, idealised representations of both feminine and masculine bodies— an ideological definition of the ideal citizen was constructed. As Tompkins remarks, the idea was to create and recreate the ideal citizen, "via the quotidian practices of correct consumption, self-care, and sexual hygiene" (6). This metaphor of an ideal citizen can be read as an instrument of biopolitics, where people are motivated with the idea of self-governance, instead of being governed by the state, which might appear autocratic. Seen through the discourse of dietetic reform, this concept of ideality can be read as yet another instance of rendering the body "docile". The value attached to the concept of body-policing as a

method to boost self-esteem is a major propaganda that promotes the "masculist and heterosexual imperative" of our society, where people are basically judged by their bodies (Cline 5). It is as Barbara Cruikshank says, "Governance in this case is something we do to our selves, not something done to us by those in power" (91). The political becomes the personal when social imperatives are identified with personal desires, thus effectively blurring the line between subjectivity and subjection (Cruikshank 92; Steinem). In this context Foucault's argument of the creation of docile bodies attends validity, as people are encouraged to be "governers of their own selves" by exercising their ability "to recognize, isolate, and act upon their own subjectivity" (Cruikshank 91). While the government and economy are thus invested in disciplining our bodies, discontent arises when individuals fail to, or refuse to give in to the disciplinary demand. It is no surprise then why women, for instance, police their and each other's bodies, and often suffer from its consequences.

The notions of bodily being are varied and ranges from overweight bodies to overindulgent bodies, bulimic bodies to heavily pregnant bodies, with fasted bodies being the ultimate symbol of self-control and discipline. As opposed to the voluntary self-discipline of say, Gandhi, and his dietary control, or religious fasts, dieting is another mode of self-discipline, which has been idealised and forced upon women to control their bodies. Specifically for females, dieting and even fasting, are mostly perceived as parts of patriarchal control, reaching almost ideological dimensions, with strict military-like discipline in some cases. Examining the almost regimental forms of women's involvement with dieting, Lavin remarks that it "drags a vital population into the domain of biopolitics— a population less subject to the disciplinary force of so many other institutions like factories and prisons" (6). This patriarchal ideology has become evident only in the contemporary times, as contributed by the studies of feminist scholars like Bartky, Bordo, and Jovanovski. Earlier such concerns were prone to remain unnoticed and unquestioned as the society was accustomed to it.

In her work *Digesting Femininities* Natalie Jovanovski traces how dieting has been a gendered phenomenon, and the harmful ways women are socialised in their relation to food. She studies the way our culture perpetuates sexual objectification of women. Jovanovski states: "As a harmful gendered phenomenon, sexual objectification is widely attributed to the patriarchal, or 'male supremacist', structure of culture, where women are said to be harmed through their treatment as sex objects and taught that their bodies are a

constant work in progress" (18). The same thought has been reflected by Sally Cline, who does not find body policing, body shaming, and the like as surprising, as in our social contexts, we are frequently judged according to our bodies. Being an ardent feminist, Cline states that, "We are socialized to win men's love and approval with our meals and our shape, to reflect male values with what we serve and how we service, and to retain this affection and respect by eating less and behaving differently ourselves" (5). Such extreme forms of dietary restrictions and body-policing, has ultimately dehumanised women. Women are then constructed simply as subjects who internalise the "watchful gaze of patriarchy", that further leads to pathological eating disorders in many cases (Jovanovski 19).

It should also be noted that with the "defeminization of diet" (Lavin 7), dietary restrictions are not only limited to women, but has also paved its way towards the supposedly impregnable terrain of masculinity. Lavin contends that the popularity of lite beer and diet soda in the 1970s is the prime example of masculine weight-watching, which also reflects, "a declining sense of economic agency among men" (7). He explains that the discourse of diet gained currency due to the public insecurity and economic uncertainty among Americans during the postwar period (7). Diet and exercise began to offer comfort as it was believed that the ability to master one's body, would ultimately result in socio-economic mastery over the nation (Lavin 7). This underlying area upon which the narrative of diet functioned, is interesting because it somewhat reflects the dietary control exercised by Gandhi, as a part of his moral and ethical beliefs and later on as a part of his nationalist endeavour. However, while dietary disciplining may be seen as a resistance against powerlessness, the very exercise nevertheless, makes one give in to the "biopolitical demand for self-governance" (Lavin xiv).

Currently the whole idea of dieting is debatable. Recent researchers like Cressida J. Heyes argues that dieting can empower women instead of oppressing them. Such authors perceive that voluntary dieting can be understood as women exercising their agency. Feminists are also accused of overlooking the autonomic potential dieting may provide where dieting can be seen as a "self-affirming behaviour" which may be adopted or resisted at one's will (Jovanovski 34). Heyes, for instance, talks about the capabilities and technologies of the self that dieting can empower. She suggests that dieting discourse is "both disciplinary and enabling" (Heyes 144-145). To continue their popularity, diet

cultures nowadays use “feminist terminology to reinforce a newly palatable culture of body policing” (Jovanovski 35). Irrespective of its self-empowering discourse, dieting is like a trap that intrinsically keeps the dieters on edge, by asserting a continued sense of bodily control. The patriarchal as well as ideological structure connecting it to the regiment of biopolitics is often, visible. Besides, as Lavin rightly remarks, the contemporary involvement with dieting, irrespective of gender, makes one feel more insecure and powerless, instead of allowing them the sought-after sense of power, sovereignty, and autonomy (xv). Thus, it is evident how biopolitics has adopted the ideologies of self-discipline and self-governance as a part of its endeavour to render the body as docile.

While dieting assumes the easy availability of food and works upon curbing its intake, in India it is a common practice for many poor Indian women to curb their hunger so that they could feed the males of the household with the limited amount of food. The artificial creation of hunger of India during the colonial times has already been discussed in the second chapter. While the Independence put an end to the occurrence of famines, “the devastation of famine deaths was replaced by the slow death of undernutrition” (Basu, Das 233). Thus, moving between two death traps of hunger, most Indian women have been naturally socialised to infer their hunger as a secondary concern and put the satiation of their families as her primary concern. The condition of food scarcity is even severe in the case of Dalit women, who are the worst sufferers both outside and inside the home.

The commercialisation of agriculture has promoted the growth of monocropping and reduced other varieties of crops being planted. This has destroyed our traditional system of balanced diet. Vandana Shiva’s paper, “Women and the Gendered Politics of Food” traces the way globalisation has turned food into a commodity, that is no longer nourishing and diverse. Shiva terms global food corporations as “global patriarchs” who removed women from agriculture. It has disrupted the indigenous food system where women produced and shared food with the society, that enhanced their creativity while keeping the society safe from hunger and undernutrition (Shiva 18). Food production is now controlled by “capitalist patriarchy” who are motivated by the maximisation of profits at the cost of health and well-being. The prevalence of heavily processed industrial food is not only bad for health but also undermines food security and food safety. As per the latest National Family Health Survey 2019-21 (NFHS-5), one finds that 53.8% of Indian women in urban areas and 58.5% in rural areas, are anaemic, due to discriminatory dietary

practices and limited food. On the other hand, the rate of overweight women has been rising steadily from 20.6% in 2015-16, to 24.0% in 2019-21. These statistics are the byproducts of commercial food where two contradictory pictures of obesity and malnourished are juxtaposed.

Also, the issue of caste, profanity, purity, religion influence the mechanics of every Indian kitchen. In India it is a common assumption that the Hindu diet is superior and hygienic to the Dalits, who belong to the lower stratum of the society. The politics of social hierarchy dictates what one is allowed to eat. Denied proper food, hunger, malnourishment, anemia are some common problems that Dalits face. The traditional Dalit dishes have been created out of scavenged foods, offal, alms, and leftovers, wherein dead cattle and beef offal remain their major source of protein. However, this cuisine born out of the need to subvert hunger and poverty, is prone to profanity, invisibility, or exoticness, by the mainstream culture, that leaves "no room for critical engagement" (Tak and Aranha). This invisibility, as Ved Prakash suggests, is defined by the politics of documentation, as. "The tools of documentation lay with the ones with power; therefore, the hegemony is exercised by them in cooking, talking, writing and publishing what was cooked in their kitchen" (158). Instead of giving in to this disciplinary force, one's engagement with Dalit cuisine should attend to its historical origin and acknowledge it as a part of the cultural practice of the Dalits. Such an engagement brings to light women's role and ingenuity in creating something nourishing out of leftovers, and passing it through the generations, thus subverting the discriminatory mores of the society.

Literature has played a great role in challenging the patriarchal attitudes of the nation. Works by Indian women reflect their subversive attitude towards the way they relate to food and eating. While food and cooking reflect their sensuousness and sexuality, they also present their resourcefulness and ways of exacting revenge, if necessary. Therefore, in Indian women's writing we witness their desire to "move from being depicted as food that is consumed by others to themselves consuming food and becoming active agents of consumption" (Malhotra et al. xii). Similarly, writers like Salman Rushdie reveal the misogynistic attitudes and behaviours exhibited by men towards women, as well as their relation to food. The next section engages with the selected texts to demonstrate the fictional engagement with the arguments made so far.

Critiquing the Politics of Food in Select Novels

This chapter has considered major theorists like Federici, Foucault, Bartky, Tompkins, Jovanovski and Lavin, to derive its arguments on food politics and the way it is punctuated by the restrictions and resistances surrounding it. Instead of limiting its focus to a specific part of the Indian society, this chapter explores the sociocultural mores regulating the lives of different classes of people. The selected novels represent four different families and therefore are representative of their respective sections: Easterine Kire's novel represents the Christian community of Nagaland, Kiran Desai's novel represents a Hindu family from a small Indian city, Shahkhot, Salman Rushdie's novel represents the Muslim community during the colonial and post-Independence period, moving between India and Pakistan; while Bama's work represents the Pariah community of Tamil Nadu. The novels allow the reader to observe four different domestic atmospheres, whereby one can derive how food politics operates, irrespective of variations in class, culture, and religion. The novels showcase different kitchen spaces and food preparations, as sites and acts, where one could quite easily witness the play of normativity as well as of non-normativity or resistance. In the novels one can witness the complex construction of femininity and the reinforcement of hegemonic submission in the Indian society, through the ways women cook and eat. Such a structure generates masculine privilege with regards to food portioning, and women have always contributed towards it.

Easterine Kire's *A Terrible Matriarchy* can be read as a representation of the unjust ways women are socialised in their relation to food. The novel traces the numerous attempts on the part of 'Grandmother', at constructing the narrator, Dielieno, into an ideal feminine subject, who would be docile and eligible for being a future housewife. The novel is recounted through the first person, and stages the friction between traditional ideas and modern thoughts. Kire's language is simple but precise, and her prose is evocative of the rustic environment of Nagaland. There is the lingering stench of superstition, throughout the narrative, that heavily influences the sociocultural beliefs of the Nagas. To make situation worse, there are also the evils of alcoholism, brawls among drunk men, domestic violence, neighbourhood gossip, along with the prevalence of patriarchal ideas, that make daily life difficult.

The novel begins with a dining scene that demonstrates the politics of serving food in the family, where meat is repeatedly gendered. The narrator's 'Grandmother' cooks rice

and chicken broth for her grandchildren and asks:

> ‘What meat do you want?” she simpered sweetly, as she ladled out gravy and meat. I quickly piped up, “I want the leg, Grandmother, give me the leg.”
>
> "I wasn’t asking you, silly girl”, she said, as she swiftly put the chicken leg in my brother’s plate, “that portion is always for boys. Girls must eat the other portions.” (Kire 1)

This remarkable exchange between ‘Grandmother’ and Dielieno, sets the stage for the rest of the narrative to unfold, with “meat” being the recurrent symbol of gender discrimination. The tart exchange reveals that meals are pre-decided for the family members, with males being the privileged subjects, and the females denied any voice against it. This is why even before the chicken is cooked it is known that boys will always get the meaty parts such as the legs of the chicken, while girls, have to be satisfied with whatever comes their way. It is not surprising given the fact that meat has long been considered as “an archetypical masculine food”, which tends to reproduce the division of gender with regards to its consumption (Sobal 135). In the paper, “Men, Meat, and Marriage: Models of Masculinity”, Jefferey Sobal presents how meat is often a contested food in Western marriages, that generates gendered negotiations in food choices. Sobal’s analyses can be applied in examining the inculcation of gendered food scripts among the children of the household, as can be seen in the case of Dielieno and her brothers. Marriage, as well as child-rearing, “involves negotiating and managing masculinities and femininities in food choices” (Sobal 135), that further reach to unjust proportions in some cases. As the food-life is a heavily gendered area, the principles of denial and supply are ever-present in any household, and it continues to “reflect, reproduce”, and at times, “oppose a variety of gendered societal food scripts”, until the values are instilled among the children (Sobal 135). Therefore, this episode is another instance of biopolitics where females are moulded through a “collective ideological effort” at making docile by the principle of denial (Tompkins 5) by the family members.

The narrator, Dielieno, is too young and too timid, to understand or to question such gendered portioning of food. What she comprehends though is that food at ‘Grandmother’s’ house is always owned only and absolutely by her ‘Grandmother’, “I never thought of it as food. It had to be attached with the pronoun “her” to make it clear

that it was food cooked and served by Grandmother so she had every right to do with it as she wished. Serving, for instance, chicken leg to my brother and none to me" (Kire 1).

On 'Grandmother's' part food is an instrument, verily charged with her oppressive matriarchal principles and emotions, which controls the diet of those she feeds. On Dielieno's part however, such portioning of the food are lessons that she should inculcate from her childhood. Incomprehensive as such rules may sound to her, she knows they are not to be questioned, as it would rather lead to the interrogation of her sense of conduct. Seen through the Foucauldian perspective, it is an example of how female docile bodies are constructed through the instrument of food, with 'Grandmother' holding power over her family, like the panopticon's supervisor.

There is no respite from 'Grandmother's' tyranny even in the privacy of their house. Dielieno's mother is always in awe of her mother-in-law and worries mostly over Dielieno's upbringing. They allow the automatic reproduction of 'Grandmother's' oppressive power when they act as if they are under surveillance. Her mother never indulges herself in food or clothes, thinking "it was sinful to eat too much of the food one really liked or wear more than two new clothes in a year" (2-3). Although just a child, Dielieno is not unaware of the division of labour and diet. Being poor, such gendered dynamics are particularly evident. She observes how her brothers are always hungry and how her mother scraps the pots for bits of food or give away portions of her meats to them, saying she is not hungry (4).

Pretty soon, little Dielieno is sent to her 'Grandmother's' house, so she could be policed into an ideal female, under her watchful gaze. There she is instructed to fetch water early in the morning, bathe with cold water even in winters, learn kitchen chores such as peeling potatoes or collecting firewood for cooking. Dielieno is not the only one learning to be of domestic use but there is also Bano, the illegitimate child of Uncle Sizo, brought upon 'Grandmother's' mercy, who sacrifices her youth to 'Grandmother's' care. That housework is an ideological arena of gendered exploitation, is very evident in the way the girls are made to work. All the tasks are designed keeping in mind the "'microphysics' of power", in order to obtain maximum profit from the working bodies of both Dielieno and Bano (Foucault, *Discipline* 138, 139). Although both are engaged in domestic chores throughout the day, their labour is "naturalized and sexualized" and thus made invisible (Federici 18). Irrespective of their hard labour, 'Grandmother' is very

frugal when it comes to serving them food. She always has good food in her house with plenty of meats, but she never allows the girls more than one or two pieces of meat. With the boys, it is entirely a different matter, as she is happy to serve more helpings to them. We see how she vies for male attention and love, by bribing them with good food: "The meat that hung on the spiked bamboo was not for us. It was for Leto and my other brothers. Father sometimes was served a plate heaped with meat" (17). McIntosh and Zey's concept of "responsibility" and "control" reveals the invidious picture of domestic food provisioning in the novel (318). It is observed that although Bano is "responsible" for cooking all their meals, she is never allowed to "control" its distribution. 'Grandmother', on the other hand, acts as an aggressive "gatekeeper" of food (Lewin 37). Although she is not "responsible" for cooking she exercises her "control" over what is cooked and how the meals are provisioned according to the eater's gender and age. This leads Bano and Dielieno to steal and eat meat when 'Grandmother' is not around. Little Dielieno wishes to be treated like her brothers at least in matters of food, but she learns that being a girl, she would never be loved as much as her brothers, for whom 'Grandmother' regularly sends meat:

> I envied them. I now knew that I would never be sent half a chicken… In my plate I found a piece of chicken meat and lots of broth. I slowly savoured my meat. Grandmother never left her pot unguarded so I could not get another piece. I should have gotten used to getting one piece of meat by now. But I always wanted more. (33)

Living at 'Grandmother's' house, Dielieno is quickly exposed to the gendered dynamics of her society. Her wonder at being treated unfavourably by her grandmother is resolved by Bano when she says that, "girl-children are never considered real members of the family. Their mission in life is to marry and have children and be able to cook and weave cloths and look after the household" (24). Such an attitude towards girls, justifies 'Grandmother's' claim that, "They have to be taught young" (5), to behave demurely, and to be satisfied with the way they are treated. This way 'Grandmother' desires to construct an ideal girl out of Dielieno, through the quotidian practices of learning domestic housework, suppressing emotions and hunger, and preferably keeping away from education; in short, by dehumanising them. Her dictatorial attitude towards the women living under her roof is motivated with idea of rendering them as docile subjects of

domesticity. She is driven by the urge to replicate the experiences of her youth: "In our day", Grandmother began, "girls did not go to school. We stayed at home and learned the housework. Then we went to the fields and learned the fieldwork as well. That way one never has a problem with girl-children. They will always be busy to get into trouble…" (22)

When Dielieno thinks of joining college, for further study, 'Grandmother' retorts, "a woman's role is to marry and bear children, remember that. That is her most important role" (190). Thus, it is evident that Naga women are always controlled through the operation of the household, that consists of endless chores, child-bearing and rearing, and husband-pleasing, that invade their personal spaces, and eat up a major part of their time. As Federici remarks, the lack of a political viewpoint makes it difficult to determine the continued "prostitution of body and mind" that housework generates over women, and it rather remains invisible (Federici 16). The co-existence of both patriarchal and matriarchal principles ensure that the system continues. Also, in this context, 'Grandmother's' house can be considered as a disciplinary institution, exhibiting the "microphysics of power" (Foucault 139), by the subtle and not so subtle art of coercion.

Kire also presents a contrast to the principles of discipline, self-governance and body-policing through the figure of Bano. Although Bano has been a docile girl, she turns bitter as she reaches her thirties. She is still stuck at 'Grandmother's' house because she is of great use to the old woman and is therefore not allowed to marry. As a result, Bano starts eating and sleeping excessively, under the very surveillant eyes of 'Grandmother'. There is nothing she could do to break Bano's silent subversion of the disciplinary principles taught to her. Rather, "Grandmother put up with it because if she were to send Bano away, there would be no one to take care of her and cook for her" (239). Nevertheless, we are also made aware of the fact that Dielieno herself practices body policing, albeit unconsciously, as she perceives Bano as a fat, ugly spinster, "Over the years she had grown very fat and eventually lost her looks… She no longer bothered to pretty herself up in case a suitable man might come along and make her an offer. When she went to the shops she waddled like a giant duck" (239). Thus, it is evident that once the ideas of body policing and self-surveillance take roots, it continues to be replicated over and over again, no matter how feminist the subjects might be.

Apart from Dielieno and Bano, 'Grandmother' also seeks to discipline Nisano, Vini's wife, when she is ordered to stay with her after Vini's death. She dictates what should be bought for the baby, Salhou to eat, play and wear, and instructed his mother to indulge in his every desire. The way 'Grandmother' pampers him is exactly opposite to how she presided over Dielieno's upbringing. According to 'Grandmother', '"A male child is to be brought up very carefully. When he is grown, he will take care of all of us"' (238). On the other hand, Nisano, who has been a victim of an abusive marriage with an alcoholic husband, feels rather "lucky" to be taken under her roof. The fact that Naga widows have no place in their in-laws' house appears rather striking as Nisano chooses the constant surveillance of 'Grandmother' over her life, instead of being without a home.

In Naga societies patriarchy works with matriarchy in terms of controlling food and its female consumers. Such constricting environment makes it extremely difficult for Naga women to raise their voices or to exercise their agencies in the society. Matriarchy is but the feminine version of patriarchy, and it is even more terrible because in such cases, women suppress other women with their power. However, it should be noted that although 'Grandmother' acts as the oppressor and is termed as a terrible matriarch, she is also the victim of the same principles that she upholds. 'Grandmother's' behaviour makes it evident that she has blurred the lines between subjectivity and subjection, by inculcating the social imperatives of Nagaland, and thereby constructing herself as an upholder of its oppressive values (Cruikshank 92; Steinem). Her idea of control, discipline, and punishment also stems from her inner insecurity. It is evident that her power lies within the household and among her family members. Her matriarchy becomes non-functional outside the household, as evident in the wry remarks of the neighbourhood women that meet Dielieno throughout the day. This is because women like 'Grandmother' do not actually hold power, but are somehow interpellated into the idea through the illusion of power. She is hardwired in such a way that she fails to see that by denying the female members any chance to exercise their agencies, she is indirectly stifling her own autonomy, and is therefore termed as a 'terrible' matriarch by the author.

Set in the small town of Shahkot, Kiran Desai's *Hullaballoo in the Guava Orchard,* revolves around the lives of Sampath and his mother Kulfi, who attempt to eke out a peaceful life within the din and clamour of their home and society. The quotidian nature of domestic life is given a dramatic turn whereby the privacy of Sampath and his family,

becomes a matter of public spectacle and governmental concern. The novel demonstrates an alternate narrative where Kulfi exercises her agency instead of being a docile subject of domesticity. Food in this novel is presented through the lens of magic realism that reveals its transgressive nature. But the question remains why the discourse of magic realism seems necessary to unveil food's liberating potential, when it concerns women. The situation gets complicated when one understands that the novel is an artistic representation of eating disorder, through the figure of Kulfi. She is named Kulfi (which means a frozen Indian dessert made of dairy), with the hope that she would be a gentle person having a cool disposition and sweet demeanour just like the dessert. However, her name itself reflects the societal expectations imposed upon her since her birth. Desai writes in an intensely colourful style to evoke the social realities of provincial India. The unexpected twists and turns in her plot make the story humourous but also present the dark side of humour. As such, the text hints at the issue of cannibalism which, although presented in a humourous vein, makes us contemplate upon society's attitude towards dietary boundaries and appetitive desires. The novel is a witty commentary on societal prejudices and the prevalence of superstitions, and questions the patriarchal perception of women, their desires, and their illnesses. The entire novel has a poetical charm as the descriptions of the events almost sing themselves to the readers. No doubt then that the novel is retained long in the memory as an aftertaste.

The novel begins with the Shahkotians experiencing a drought due to lack of rainfall and extreme heat. The situation induces a scarcity in food and the turmoil faced by the people gets dramatically reflected in the "eccentric" figure of Kulfi (Desai 21). We witness the transgression of food between the borders of the public and the private sphere, as the rising scarcity of food in the market becomes directly proportional to the increase in Kulfi's hunger. Heavily pregnant and therefore enormously large, Kulfi descends into an appetitive hysteria:

> Meal after meal of just rice and lentils could not begin to satisfy the hunger that grew inside Kulfi; she bribed the vegetable sellers and the fruit sellers and the butcher with squares of silk, with embroidery, a satin petticoat, an earring set in gold, a silver nutcracker, bits of her dowry that had not yet been pawned. She bribed them until they had nothing left to give her anyway. By then, her hunger was so fierce, it was like a big, prowling animal. (5)

Her frequent visits to the market, her strange demeanour and her growing stomach piques the attention of her family, her neighbours, and the passer-by, who look at her maternal body with curiosity and revulsion:

> People stopped short in amazement as she walked down the street. How big she was! … they looked around for just another sight of that stomach extending improbably before her like a huge growth upon a slender tree. Her eyes were so dark, so sooty and vehement, though, these people who turned their heads to stare turned quickly away again, ill at ease for some reason and unsettled. (4)

Kulfi's hunger fills her body with a sense of urgent agency, that makes her resistant to the disciplinary policies of the patriarchal society that she lives in. Oblivious to the "watchful gaze of patriarchy" (Jovanovski 19), Kulfi fills her mind with the thought of "chopping and bubbling, of frying, slicing, stirring, grating" (Desai 5). Kulfi's dream of food is utopic in nature and her fantasy of eating threatens to break free of all restraints, until the house fails to contain her desires:

> She was thinking of fish … in many forms. Of fish big enough and good enough to feed the hunger that had overtaken her in the past months like a wave. She thought of fish curries and fish kebabs. Of pomfret, bekti, ruhi. Of shoals of whiskered shrimp. Of chewy mussels. She thought of food abundant in all its many incarnations. Of fenugreek and camel milk, yam and corn. Mangoes and coconuts and custard apples. Mushrooms sprouting like umbrellas in the monsoon season. Nuts, wrinkled in their shells, brown-skinned, milky-fleshed. (4)

Unable to fulfill her extravagant dreams of eating, she turns to fill the walls, floors and even the ceilings of her house, with drawings of fantastical dishes and scenes of buffet. Her illustrations can be read as her attempt at a metaphorical feast that would soothe the immensity of her hunger. It cannot however be denied that Kulfi is as much a victim of eating disorder as of patriarchy, and her dietetic illness can be read as a means to protect her "self" from the aggressive demands of societal conventions. On a related note, eating disorders can occur in humans irrespective of age, gender, and culture, and are considered as "a collection of symptoms and feelings which relate to eating behaviour, weight, feeling about one's body and food itself" (Levens vii). Eating disorders are as much parts of cultural phenomena, as of medical complexities; and their popularity has resulted in equal

amounts of studies from both the fields of medicine and social sciences. Writers like Margo Maine focuses on the lived experiences and the emotions of the victim. She studies the way individual gendered realities are constructed by incorporating socioeconomic, cultural, psychological, and historical discourses, at various points of time (Maine 8). Kulfi, who is denied a voice of her own, articulates her inner turmoil through her art, that consists of drawing and cooking, both ruled by her imaginative excess and working as alternative languages of communication.

Since there is always a hint of magical undercurrent in Kulfi's demeanour and her cooking, it is imperative to briefly study the relation of magic to eating disorder. Mary Levens, a well-known psychotherapist, has some interesting insights to offer in this case. According to her, victims of severe eating disorders, "subject their bodies to the will of their minds" (3). Patients suffering from eating disorders, explains Levens, "must have absolute control over natural bodily processes. Since they have not achieved a completely integrated sense of their body and mind, they become excessively dependent upon some external regulator to compensate for what is experienced as a state of internal deficiency" (3). The need to control and protect the self becomes so urgent that some protective behaviours "lose their rationale and become a ritual" over time with repetition (Levens 5). Going by Levens, it is evident that Kulfi's abusive behaviour towards food stems from the need to protect herself from hunger, and that she derives a sense of control through her cooking. The ability to cook whenever and whatever she fancies, is necessary to maintain her sense of autonomy. The repeated acts of cooking and thinking about food, gradually, lose their rationality, and seems to become her ritualistic obsession.

Desai's use of magic realism in the presentation of eating disorder is remarkable, as it seeks to question and subvert the hegemonic social narratives, that reduce women to docile subjects and simply perceive their psychological illnesses as hysteria, or even madness. It is even more apparent when we understand the popular Indian opinion that eating disorders are afflictions of the Western culture, and is thus, alien to India (Parry). In an article entitled, "Eating Disorders are all but unstudied in India", it is observed that, such beliefs are, "a barrier to diagnosis, as it adds to the stigma associated with the conditions and may discourage sufferers from coming forward" (Parry). Thus, it is not surprising why Kulfi is held as an eccentric endowed with magical power, by the society.

Tangled in such constricting social situations, Kulfi sees cooking as the only path

of escape from her reality. Since she can enact her autonomy through cooking, it helps her to transgress the oppressive bounds of patriarchy. After moving to the forest, Kulfi sets up her kitchen right at the intersection of nature and culture and we witness how her open kitchen is transformed into a space of resistance to and liberation from hegemonic restraints. Her kitchen facilitates a revival of human's primary relation to nature, and becomes a site of "utopic possibilities", as it empowers her repressed self (Tompkins 10). She discovers "the relief of space", and her hysteria and feelings of suffocation is replaced by a sense of liberation and a harmonious relation with nature (Desai 78). Nevertheless, the political dimension of home is recreated in the orchard, as her family and other people start to translocate to the orchard and attempt to establish a sense of patriarchal control through their constant surveillance. However, through her cookery, Kulfi chooses to present herself as an independent individual, rather than a docile subject "devoid of biopower" (Amigot, Pujal 648). Desai's narrative presents a clear picture of the fusion of the biological elements into the personal dietary choices of Kulfi and her son. The unlimited freedom in the forest allows her to recreate the very concept of food and edibility, as she begins to enter the territory of what has been generally classified as non-food:

> She waded out into the muddy ponds to collect lotus stems, raided bird's nests, prised open tightly sealed pods, nibbled at the grasses and buds, dug at roots, shook the fruit from the trees and returned home with her hair wild, her muddy hands full of flowers, her mouth blue and red from all she had sampled. The corners of her sari were tied into knots containing ginger lilies and rain-fever mushrooms, samples of seeds and bits of bark. (Desai 100-101)

Her cooking is reflective of her ambition, inspiration, and ecstasy, and it becomes a rewarding challenge for her to produce complex meals deftly combined with numerous local ingredients, that she herself gathers from the hillside adjoining the orchard. Her kitchen is embellished with all manners of roots, berries, and wild fruits, that are pickled, or fermented, or laid out to dry, to facilitate her cooking. Several pages of the novel are dedicated to the complex cuisine of Kulfi which brings out her creative nature even though she suffers from eating disorders:

> The meats were beaten to silk, so spiced and fragrant they clouded the senses; the sauces were full of strange hints and dark undercurrents … small river fish baked

> in green coconuts, rice steamed with nasturtium flowers in the pale hollow of a bamboo stem, mushrooms red-and yellow-gilled, polka-dotted and striped". (Desai 102)

This way, Kulfi's cooking attempts to overthrow the cultural dietary politics, as she continues her epicurean activities even under the heavily surveillant and suspicious eyes of the society:

> A single grain of one thing, a bud of another, a moist fingertip dipped lightly into a small vial and then into the bubbling pot; a thimble full, a matchbox full, a coconut shell full of dark crimson and deep violet, of dusty yellow spice, the entire concoction simmered sometimes for a day or two on coals that emitted only a glimmer of faint heat or that roared like a furnace as she fanned them with a palm leaf. (Desai 102)

Thus, the supposedly quotidian dynamics of the kitchen becomes a spectacular function, laid bare to the eyes of the public. Her dishes are so utopic and so ambitious that Sampath's devotees linger around her with excitement, "greedily, trying to peer into the bubbling pots, to draw their fingers through the piles of spices on the grinding stone" (Desai 103).

Drunk with biopower and autonomy, the heady concoction of her dishes however traps her in a frenzy of creating something more dramatic with a special kind of meat. She has already experimented with several species of birds, animals and insects, but still desires to eat the flesh of tigers, bears, elephants and monkeys. In fantasising about eating monkeys, Kulfi comes very close to the practices of cannibalism. Her desire to cook something dramatic is fulfilled as the curious spy, in a chaotic turn of events, falls right into Kulfi's cooking pot. By staging the possibility of cannibalism, Desai questions the cultural attitudes towards women's appetite. It also brings in the issue of gendered power relations as the failure to control the appetitive desires among women can be seen as a threat to the society, leading to their ostracisation. Thus, hinting at the subconscious cannibalistic desires of Kulfi, Desai alludes to the intermixture of fear, repulsion, and fascination, that are evoked at various times by configuring some specific subjects such as the colonised, or the working classes or some women, as cannibals (Brown 4). In Kulfi's case, hunger acts as an instrumental "life driving-force", that provide her the required agency to rule her own life (Probyn 82). However, the idea of labelling her hunger as

cannibalistic, implies to the social attempts at dehumanising such subjects, without considering the reasons for their actions. Kulfi is thus dehumanised because her desires also in a way reflect the obsessive desires of the Indian society that has been increasingly becoming materialistic, superstitious, and consumerist. To quote Jennifer Brown, "The cannibal figure represents the fear that our appetite for consumption knows no end, and indeed reminds us of our own potential inhumanity" (7). Lastly, the ending of the novel also points to the severity of Kulfi's eating disorder, that intensifies with the lack of medical attention and social ignorance.

Food takes up a political turn when it engages itself with the representation of the Dalits. Denied a voice of their own the Dalits speak alternatively through the language of food and hunger, as depicted in the novel. Bama's *Sangati* engages at length with the deprivation of food among the Dalits, and especially among its women. The fact that, "female bodies are worked upon in socially and historically specific ways, rather than in terms of an eternal, undifferentiated opposition between the sexes", is clearly represented in the context of the novel (Mc Nay37). Being poor, Dalit women cannot afford to sit back at home, but have to go out for daily labour, where they routinely face victimisation. Additionally, they are burdened with housework which has been naturalised and sexualised as a feminine task (Federici 18). Most of the problems that Dalit women face lack proper representation because Third World feminism in general, and Indian feminist theories in particular, stage a crisis when it comes to the issue of Dalit women. Therefore, many theories that seek female emancipation become insufficient to address the problems of Dalit women. *Sangati* is a classic example of gender and caste-based discrimination as it presents how capitalism and casteism has been working in tandem to exploit Dalit women in both their productive and reproductive lives. The text revolves around the daily domestic and public events in the lives of Dalit women, which is reflective of the fact that "the shape and form of any revolution are decided in the daily realities and social construction of sex, care, food, love, and health" (De Angelis). Silvia Federici has identified this zone as the zero point, where revolutionary social relations are born that can potentially emancipate them and also influence other domains. Federici's arguments is supportive to the text, as seeking to emancipate the Dalits from their position, is also a kind of revolution.

The editors Sunaina Arya and Aakash Singh Rathore, of the book *Dalit Feminist Theory*, suggest that although mainstream Indian feminists claim to represent all Indian women, their approach is flawed as they are generally caste-privileged members of the society (Arya, Rathore 1). A comprehensive gender theory, as Arya and Rathore suggest, would require an alternative perspective, that can be provided by the Dalit feminists (Arya, Rathore 2). Bama's novel presents an alternative and radical perspective by presenting the story in a hybrid narrative form that works through the appropriation of different registers such as the mythic, the historical and the immediate (Nayar 365). Bama states that, Dalit literature is at par with black literature, feminist literature, and communist-socialist literature (Bama and Vijayalakshmi 97), which carries within it the task of Dalit liberation. The literature of the dominant caste becomes defunct in such cases as they can never represent the agony of Dalit oppression, nor can they voice their need for liberation (Bama and Vijayalakshmi 97). Language plays a crucial role in Dalit literature as it is through the play of language that the Dalit voices can expect to be heard. Dalit literature seeks to incorporate Dalit vocabulary and speech, which tries to "overstep" and disturb "the rules of the 'dominant' grammar" (Bama and Vijayalakshmi 98). Subversion is present in the very exercise of Dalit writing that oversteps and disturbs "the rules of the 'dominant' grammar" (Bama, Vijayalakshmi 98). The mingling of the different registers along with the personal voice of the narrator makes Bama's narrative more than a piece of ethnographic work or a social document of Dalit experiences. Her representation is so accurate that it can be considered as cultural memorabilia of Dalit lives.

Most of the events in the novels are presented through the dialogues between women, that present multiple perspective of the events, thereby adding depth to Dalit lifeworld. The subjectivity of Dalit women is central to the narrative and is represented through their various engagement to food work. As in Easterine Kire's novel, gender discrimination is quite a common trend in *Sangati*. Among the Dalits, women are the economic backbone of the household, as they work as much as men to bring food to the table. Nevertheless, their economic contribution cannot protect them from getting abused by their own men. Wholesome meals are hardly an option, therefore they derive nourishment from scraps such as mango peels and stones, while the boys enjoy the fruits. The narrator remarks: "Because we had no other way out, we picked up and ate the leftover skins" (8). Learning to eat the leftovers is a part of their lesson in docility, as it teaches them to be content with whatever they have. Discriminatory patriarchal values are subtly

inculcated through their childhood although the community claims to make no gender difference among the children. Boys are raised in such a way that they grow up to dominate the females. For instance, boys are breast fed longer, while girls are weaned away quickly. Boys can eat and play as much as they want but girls hardly ever experience the joys of being a child, rather. they have to stay at home and learn household chores. Even the games they play are intensely gendered, as girls aren't allowed to play games of kabaddi or marbles, but rather train themselves for future domestic servitude through the games of cooking and marriage. On the other hand, boys usually copy their elders and abuse the girls in a playful manner for not serving proper food and so on. These "pretence blows" become real when they grow up (31).

The text stages various debates between the subversive narrator and her orthodox grandmother that present the unjust rules Dalit females must follow. The exercise of docility is once again visible as girls are not allowed to talk or laugh loudly, not permitted to sleep on their backs, and are not supposed to eat before the males of the house, even if they are extremely hungry. The narrator questions: "what would be so wrong if we changed that and the women ate first?'" (30). To discourage such subversive questions, Patti recalls the folk story of one Anantamma of West Street, who even though pregnant, was beaten to a pulp, as she dared just once, to eat her meal before her husband ate. According to Patti women are bound to be abused if they behave in unexpected ways, like eating before feeding their husbands. Women like Patti are the primary subjects of docility, as their identities and existences revolve around the set norms of patriarchy. The very denial of proper food and the frequent experiences of hunger are common to all Dalit women, and is a part of their unjust socialisation to food.

Although the narrator feels exasperated that women themselves discriminate against other women, she realises that this has been the norm for every Dalit girl since they are born. It does not matter whether Dalit women are pregnant or are exhausted with their workload, they do not get proper nutrition or a good night's sleep as they have to come back home and complete the domestic chores, look after the children, gather water and firewood, cook meals, and then also satisfy their husband's physical hunger. On the other hand, the males would eat until they are full and blow off money at the shops. The narrator remarks that Dalit women occupy a pitiful and humiliating position, both in the society and at home: "even if all women are slaves to men, our women are really the worst

sufferers" (65) Dalit women are bound to be oppressed at all levels: "In fields they have to escape from upper-caste men's molestations. At church they must lick the priest's shoes and be his slaves … Even when they go to their own homes, before they have had a chance to cook some kanji or lie down and rest a little, they have to submit themselves to their husband's torment" (35). Thus, there is a lack of a safe place for women, as men can always control their existence.

The strain of poverty and hunger is evident in the case of the narrator's cousin, Mariamma, who loses her mother and has to work very hard to feed her family. She does not even have enough blood to mensurate, due to the lack of proper nutrition and heavy workload. Even heavily pregnant women go to work in the fields, so that they could earn their daily meals. Their lifelong agony is voiced by Patti, the narrator's grandmother who is herself a follower of patriarchal norms:

> We have to work in the fields as hard as men do, and then on top of that, struggle to bear and raise our children. As for the men, their work ends when they've finished in the fields. If you are born into this world, it is best you were born a man. Born as women, what good do we get? We only toil in the fields and in the home until our very vaginas shrivel. (6-7)

Additionally, women are cheated in their pay even though they do the same work as men. Dalit women's work range from digging wells, weeding, harvesting, and gathering firewood. But the meagre payment that they receive for their labour is hardly enough to buy their daily kanji, that is nothing but a "thin gruel of rice or other grains or just the starchy water drained from cooked rice" (124). Thus, it is evident that Dalit women's productive labour at the fields and the domestic labour at their homes are invisibilised and even naturalised by the capitalist economy and the caste-system of the society, and therefore remain unacknowledged and mostly uncompensated.

Instead of acknowledging their roles as food providers, women are seen as food to be devoured by the lustful hunger of men. While returning from work, Mariamma faces molestation at the hands of an upper caste man, Kumarasami Ayya. Instead of protecting the victim, the village elders orders her to plead guilty, and also asks her to pay a fine of 200 rupees, for behaving in an inappropriate manner. Being outcastes, the Dalits fear to ask for justice against the landowners, because only they can provide them work. Even

though oppressed, Dalit women are very resourceful when it comes to food. It is observed that both the daily and ceremonial food of the Dalits centre around scarcity, as their customs are born out of poverty. Dalit dishes like ragi kali, kanji, kuzhambu, grass-seed rice, carry political undertones as they are representative of Dalit counternarratives. The dishes mentioned in the text hold "a host of complex and meaningful cultural values that derive as much from its preparation as from its consumption" (Tompkins 71). They are culturally valuable because their meals reflect the skillful utilisation of meagre resources, whereby they learn to convert non-food into potential sources of nourishment. They debate over their meagre dishes such as ragi-kuuzh, and discuss how the tastes of their daily meals can be enhanced (37). During famines when they have no food, they winnow grass seeds and even cook that for their weddings, thus converting non-food such as grass seeds, to celebratory meals. Even under normal circumstances, the families are so poor that simple meals like rice, rasam, and curry are considered as festive dishes. It is evident that among the Dalits millet is their staple food, while rice, which is the staple diet of most Indians, is considered as a luxury food among the Dalits. The narrator describes how people planning to host wedding parties have to begin saving rice from the previous harvest. Dalit wedding feasts are generally indicative of the hunger and struggle for food among the community as the tradition of "box-rice" indicates. Guests coming over to feast would also bring boxes, "woven of fibre which they would fill with rice and take home. This was known as 'box-rice'. They usually took this rice home, covered it in water, and ate it the next day. Even while they were being served, they would scoop up some rice and set it aside. What else can people who struggle for their livelihood do? (85)

The greatest struggle among Dalits is to find enough food for their daily meals. But the narrator asks, "Why do we alone have to struggle so much for a mouthful of kanji? … Why is it that people who don't do a stroke of work can fill their bellies so easily, while for us life is always a "lottery"?" (104). The questions raised in the text interrogates the issue of hunger among the Dalits. Hunger is symbolic of the oppressive regime wherein their bodily and social concerns are entangled. Their constant struggle for food is indicative of their inferior social status, while it is evident that for the discriminatory caste-hierarchy to continue, they must remain hungry. In such context, Dalit food acquires a political voice, as its very existence stems from the fight against hunger. Thus, Dalit dishes are endowed with complex cultural values that are meaningful for their communal identity and is symbolic of their continued struggle for survival.

Assessing its relative invisibility in the mainstream, Ved Prakash suggests, Dalit food is "seen as a site of risk that may disrupt the harmonious clean social framework" (162). Dalit works like that of Bama, strives to challenge such normative silences around their daily struggle by documenting their resourcefulness to make the best of the worst. *Sangati* fills the need for documenting and appreciating the Dalit culture and its social contribution. In the text, the narrator refuses to believe that Dalits are helpless, and looks at the various ways they can exercise their agency. The appropriation of the mainstream vocabulary as reflected by Bama's rhetoric, and the subversion of hunger, as portrayed in her work, are two main methods by which an effective political discourse is generated.

Since its publication *Midnight's Children* has been lauded for its rather imaginative and meticulous use of language, so much so that taking it up for textual analysis seems like a mere cliched attempt when compared to the vast body of research it has generated till date. Nevertheless, the current chapter requires a reconsideration of the novel through the lens of food, as it remains an important sociocultural aspect in the construction of the formal structure of the novel. The terrain of Rushdie's metafiction is rather complex and food being transgressive in nature, becomes the perfect vehicle to navigate through personal as well as public history. The following analysis will deal with the agentic materiality of food as presented in the novel.

In *Imaginary Homelands* Rushdie admits that he began writing *Midnight's Children* with a "somewhat Proustian ambition to unlock the gates of lost time so that the past reappeared as it actually had been, unaffected by the distortions of memory" (*Imaginary* 10). In the field of food studies Marcel Proust is revered for his description of the way memories are revived and emotions are awakened by food. While eating a piece of tea-soaked madeleine Proust embarks a nostalgic journey as he is transported back to his childhood memories of Combray. Similarly, Rushdie's narrator Saleem Sinai attempts to harness the "anamnestic power" (Boyce 272) of food, particularly chutney, as an anchor to the nation "sinking into amnesia" (Rushdie, *Midnight's* 538). It is this very ambition of harnessing the nostalgic power of food that is involved in the conception and development of *Midnight's Children*, although Rushdie is well aware of and even takes advantage of the susceptibility of memory and personal truth. To further dramatise his narrative, the author uses food metaphors in an ironical way.

The novel is celebrated for the coinage and conception of "chutnification" through which Hindi and Urdu words are seamlessly blended into the English language, to provide a distinct and flavourful narrative of India. Rushdie is aware of the potential of food and employs it as an essential bulwark around the metafiction of the nation. Instead of a thematic engagement with food, the author uses food as the major structural element to support the politics of the book. Rushdie's language is carnivalesque in the sense that it questions and challenges the hegemony of the nation and its narrative, and chutnified in the sense that it uses a hybrid language in an attempt to "decolonize" the very language in which he writes. Food and the culinary shape the formal structure of the novel as the author aligns "narration with cooking, reading and listening with eating and the narrative as a whole with a particular foodstuff: chutney" (Heise 141). A few food-centred analyses bring certain implicit aspects of the novel to the fore. For instance, Sharmila Sen's *Eating India* highlights how a peripheral condiment like the chutney is central to Rushdie's narration (S. Sen 90). Just like the chutney or pickles in which the decomposition of fruits and vegetables are merely delayed, Saleem's memories are also prone to distortions due to the passage of time (S. Sen 118, 120). Sen warns us of the dangers of commodification that novel is prone to under Western interpretations (S. Sen 134). She also brings in the questions of commodification and Indianess and stresses that Saleem's version should not be considered as the authentic representation of Indian history. Although her statements have been interesting, her arguments remain half-baked since she, "fails to define it within the context of her study or discuss the debate of authorship, ownership and voice that it is part of" (Heise 151). *Midnight's Children* occupies a major part in Henriette Heise's PhD thesis *Food & Words: The Culinary and the Alimentary as Critical Tools*, where she engages with the ambivalent representation of food in the novel. She uses chutney as a lens to examine the text. Since cooking is akin to narration in the novel, she problematises Saleem's claim of narrative legitimisation as well as the position of the "pickler-in-chief", in relation to the other cooks who are also "potential competitors" of the same (Heise 166). Further, she suggests that both pickles and narratives are open to new interpretations by each consumer, therefore Saleem's aim of narrative, meaning and control is unattainable (Heise 186).

In accordance to Rushdie's anamnestic aim, the narration of *Midnight's Children* begins at the private factory of Braganza Pickles, where Saleem works as the "pickler-in-chief" (Rushdie 459), while writing a master narrative, for mass-consumption (Heise 146).

The location of the narration and the events in the narrative occupy a radical juncture that is at once public as well as private. The pickle factory is the transactional and transformative space in the novel where both memory as well as food, associated to those memories, are chutnified and pickled, in an attempt to preserve and publish food and history, for both personal and public use. Like the recipes of pickles or chutneys, Rushdie uses a heteroglot language by incorporating various speech styles ranging from Hindu myths, public speeches, news reports, filmic scripts, private thoughts of its characters, and many more, to spice up his narrative. This way he cooks up a savoury narrative that fuses all the elements together, like a good pickle, to give us a taste of the events as experienced by Saleem in particular and the nation in general.

Saleem's use of language is remarkable as it asserts his mixed heritage. Like the pickle and the chutney that he makes, his lineage and his life are mixed together by history and the crime of Mary Pereira. Therefore, Saleem is at once the illegitimate son of the colonist William Methwold and Vanita (the wife of Winkie, the poor busker), and legally the son of Ahmed and Amina Sinai. It is no surprise then that Saleem's demeanour reminds us of the different spectrums of his lineage, just like the taste of his chutneys are supposed to remind the "amnesiac nation" of its collective memories, dreams, and ideas (Rushdie 643). At the outset Saleem wants us to believe that he is, and always has been, an "object or target of power" (Foucault, *Discipline* 136), "mysteriously handcuffed to history" (Rushdie 3) at birth, and then controlled by the politics of the country, throughout his life. Using the vehicle of food Saleem demonstrates his position as the victim while presenting the women in his life as "monstrous" (Weickgenannt 65, 72). This has led various critics to deem both Saleem and Rushdie as misogynists, but one cannot ignore Rushdie's "strategic use of misogynist elements" that "reveal the way gendered stereotypes are employed to reinforce patriarchal structures" (Weickgenannt 82).

While building upon the communicative power of food, the novel also stages how cooking places can also be spaces of self-defense, comfort, and liberation, even within the patriarchal atmosphere. All the women in the novel such as Reverend Mother, Mary Pereira, Aunt Alia, Parvati and Padma perceive the realm of the culinary as the only space where they can vent their emotions, be it anger, guilt, regret, love, or confusion. The infusion of food with emotions is a recurrent motif in the novel and has its share of popularity in many critical discussions of the novel. The women in the novel seem to be

aware of the power food can yield, and use it to their advantage. Family members and other acquaintances are seemingly made docile through their acts of consumption. In their hands food items are devices that assure the automatic functioning of power and control among its partakers.

Saleem recalls how Reverend Mother claims the kitchen and the pantry as the "twin hearts of her kingdom" (48) against Aadam Aziz's attempt at modernising her. She denies all kinds of outer influences from entering those places where food is prepared and eaten, "Pantry and kitchen were her inalienable territory; and she defended them ferociously" (48). The way Saleem describes her dietary control reminds us of the panopticon's supervisor, as the dinner proceedings appear to be very tight and vehemently calibrated: "No food was set upon the table, no plates were laid. Curry and crockery were marshalled upon a low side-table by her right hand, and Aziz and the children ate what she dished out" (51). In one instance, when Dr Aziz expels the children's religious tutor, because he "was teaching them to hate", she even goes so far as to completely stop serving meals to her husband, in order to protect her religious sentiments. While denying political matters any space in her household, she creates a stern atmosphere of food politics, that carries the potential to not only feed the inhabitants of the household but also to feed upon them, if they go against her wishes. She refuses to be the cliched domestic victim and instead unleashes her fury upon her husband. Dr Aziz's starved body becomes "a battlefield" and, "Day by day the five children watched their father disappearing, while their mother grimly guarded the dishes of food (51). Thus, Reverend Mother occupies a liminal role in the narrative as she ignores the traditional role of nourishing her family and instead appears to "thrive" on her husband's weakness (381). In the later part of the novel Reverend mother's ability to infuse food with emotions is extended to the functioning of the Sinai family. As the Muslim assets were frozen for a while, and Ahmed Sinai laid helpless, Reverend Mother's food helps to revive him, while her "curries filled with ancient prejudices", converts into a sense of sin for Amina, who gambled on horse races to earn money (192).

Similarly, Mary's chutneys, kasaundies, and pickles of various kinds, generate a sense of guilt among the consumers of the Sinai household, as she stirs in them, her guilt, fear, and shame of the sin she committed by exchanging the parentage of Saleem and Shiva, at their birth. We also find Amina learning the trick from Mary, and stirring in her marital "disappointments into a hot lime chutney" that "bring tears to the eyes" (242).

Saleem is at his most bitter and most manipulative self while describing Alia's cooking skills. Being a rival to Amina, Alia's cooking is portrayed as having a disintegrating and final effect on the Sinai family. According to Saleem, his aunt grudges Ahmed for rejecting her in favour of Amina, and as a way of revenge, hones the art of venting her frustration into the dishes she cooks: "she fed us the birianis of dissension and the nargisi koftas of discord; and little by little, even the harmonies of my parents' autumnal love went out of tune" (459). Instead of considering her resourcefulness, Saleem sees Alia's hospitality and culinary skills as her "long nurtured ambition" of revenge, and "long-simmered wrath", against his family (460, 462). It is pitiable to observe the way Saleem places all the blame on Alia's food, starting from the "shrivelled" Amina and the "unnerved" Ahmed, to the rest of the nation getting "thrashed like flies in the webs of my aunt's revenge" (461-463). In this case, we witness the personal becoming the political, as personal invectives are identified with social stereotypes.

Food preparation pave the way to control and influence the inhabitants of the household and instead of being "invisible" workers in the kitchen, the women could attempt to transgress the national script for middle class Indian women. Their transgressive and subversive nature stands as a threat to the patriarchal order and therefore they are perceived as monsters by Saleem (Weickgenannt 65). Nicole Weickgenannt's article "The Nation's Monstrous Women: Wives, Widows and Witches in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*" is an interesting study in this area. Weickgenannt studies the presentation of misogyny in the novel as clever strategy developed by the author, to criticise the ambiguous and discriminatory rhetoric of the nation's script for the middle-class Indian women. She examines the sinister atmosphere evoked in its presentation of women and comments that "women in *Midnight's Children* cannot be portrayed as powerful without at the same time carrying the potential for the monstrous" (72).

Looking through the lens of food, one can recognise how Saleem uses it as a manipulative weapon against the female characters of the narrative, while accusing them of using food as a means of their self-protection. Saleem's manipulation of food and cooking serves two purposes: first, it presents him as a victim and grants him "narrative legitimisation and ownership over the narrative" and second, it relegates the women in his life as secondary figures brewing nothing but trouble for him (Heise 142, 166). The following excerpt presents the way Saleem uses this strategy to tame the women in his life,

appropriate their skills and confidently pass it off as solely his accomplishment:

> What my aunt Alia took pleasure in: cooking. What she had, during the lonely madness of the years, raised to the level of an art-form: the impregnation of food with emotions. To whom she remained second in her achievements in this field: my old ayah, Mary Pereira. By whom, today, both old cooks have been outdone: Saleem Sinai, pickler-in-chief at the Braganza pickle works. (459)

Although Saleem claims to have “outdone” them, the women are the actual “cultural agents” who “develop the language of food… and the art of preserving and creating narrative by cooking” (Heise 169). Being denied equal participation in the family affairs, or being rejected or ignored by their lovers/husbands, these women transform the cooking places into their little kingdoms where they can seek refuge and derive pleasure by exercising and refining their intricate cooking skills. Heise remarks that, “By cooking, they actively engage in cultural production and although Saleem lays claim to being the ‘master’ of the narrative and of chutney, the women in his life are literally his ‘masters’ as he learned his art from them” (Heise 169). Through Saleem’s alimentary invective, the author presents how men try to subordinate women as soon as they demonstrate their political stance against the script of domesticity and docility, that routinely exploit their labour by naturalizing it as a feminine attribute (Federici 18). Although Saleem is accused of being a misogynist, it should be noted that Rushdie uses this very trait as a double-edged sword to cut through the historiographical and political discourse of the nation, in order to lay bare, the discriminatory rhetoric of domesticity (Weickgenannt 65). As Weickgenannt rightly comments, “Rushdie develops the dark underside of the nationalist construct of women which seeks to mobilize women’s strength, while trying to contain its threatening potential lest it undermine patriarchal structures” (72). While Saleem portrays them as monstrous, sinister figures who cannot be trusted, it instead brings out his unreliability as the narrator. Thus, the power of the novel lies in the misogynist perception of Saleem as his apparent demonising of women brings out their integrity and their biopower.

In spite of his grand claims Saleem fails in his attempt to harness the actual power of food. While a food centered reading helps to identify the novel’s implicit representation of the repressed women, it also reveals the instability of Saleem’s aim to attain narrative control or even narrative legitimisation, as analysed in details by Heise (Tompkins 10; Heise 186). Moreover, Saleem’s association with the pickling process remains superficial

as we never see him actually preparing the condiments whereby, he could have attempted to infuse all his knowledge, effort, and emotions. Although Saleem occupies the position of "pickler-in-chief", his job seems to be restricted only upto the selection of the best fruits and the vegetables. Saleem appears only the alleged "pickler-in-chief" devising ways to construct and sell his narrative. It can be said that his involvement in the realm of the culinary is only limited to derive personal pleasure as he feeds on the women's emotions and their food (Rushdie 174). Additionally, Saleem's methods of objectifying, demonising and suppressing the women fails because they are the governors of their own selves. The chutneys, koftas, pickles, curries, biryanis, and the endless number of dishes prepared by the women throughout the narrative, can be read as powerful artefacts of subversion through which they resist and challenge the patriarchal power and exercise their agency. Those moments when the pleasure of consumption is disrupted and the consumers are made uncomfortable, as they experience the makers' emotions, are the moments of triumph against their domestic exploitation.

Conclusion

This chapter has studied the politics of food in the context of the domestic sphere. The questions of power, powerlessness and resistance against oppression has been examined. It has studied the continuation of gender discrimination in the household, through the habits of unequal portioning of food, dietary denials, and the apparent invisibility of domestic work. It has applied Foucault's idea of docile bodies into the operation of household, to understand the way bodies attain docility through the act of eating. It has also examined the ideas of dieting and the ill effects of body policing and self-surveillance. The selected novels represent the political aspects of food through its cooking and consumption. They facilitate different kitchen spaces and food preparations, as sites and acts, where one could quite easily witness the play of normativity as well as non-normativity or resistance. In Kire's novel, food becomes a source of oppression while in Desai's novel food helps in the subversion of patriarchal constructs, although later Kulfi's obsessive persuasion of food is also seen in terms of cannibalism. Bama's work documents the Dalit women's resourcefulness in the creation of nutritious food from leftover or rejected food scraps and non-food items, thereby challenging the normative silences around their hungry lives. While assessing Rushdie's work the analysis moves beyond the patriarchal aura of Saleem's chutnification to actually consider the representation of the

women whom Saleem tries to vilify and repress. The chapter considers how food acts as the sole device of power to challenge the manipulative and misogynistic narrative weaved by Saleem. As opposed to Foucault, the chapter proves that women's bodies are not passive, but carry agentic potentiality, and therefore cannot be always disciplined or subdued. Moreover, the chapter identifies food and food-work as potential pathways to make women's work visible and also to transgress their patriarchal constraints.