

The Outrageous Power of Food in Preethi Nair's
The 100 Shades Of White

S. Karthika, II M.A. English

=====
Changes are the one that cannot be changed. As with such changes, the Indian society and the literature had came up. The Indian writing in English had been brought centuries ago. And now it flourished away with the clear view point and reached the towers of intellectuality high. In such a way, Preethi Nair is one of the most best-known authors in the ocean of Indian writing in English literature. Born in Kerala, her writings had the Kerala is the regional settings of her novel. Though she brought up in United Kingdom, she had the ancestral roots of the India.

Preethi Nair had the style of writing with the Indian traditions and cultures in touch. Her novels are Gypsy Masala, 100 Shades of White, The Colour of Love. Each and every of her novel had the Indian touch. And she had also written play Dreaming Alice: The Looking Glass and The Whole 5 Yards.

The novel *100 Shades of White* shows the different aspects of an author's view point and the portrayal regarding woman in the society. And mostly she had brought the outstanding idea of using the spices or food as magic tool to perform the changes which the author liked to. The usage of food as a magic tool is different in writing style of the author.

The story of the novel revolves around Nalini and her children Maya and Sachin. The story is designed with the techniques of stream of consciousness. The protagonist Nalini is the narrator. She explains her life in Kerala with her mother working as a maid in rich family. Her mother says the whole managing attitude of the family lies in the hands of the one who makes the food for the family. She says that the spices and the food have the ability to change the situation from bad to good or from good to bad. She will watch the situations in the family and then prescribe the spices accordingly.

Thus, in such a way, the healthy conditions of the Kathi family are controlled and taken into care by her mother as a cook and Nalini as her assistant. Her mother says, "If the ingredients are incorrect administered, or if you work with bad intention, it can also bring the most disastrous results" (100 SOW 55). Her mother maintained the merriment of Kathi family with her cooking magic. The role of spices played an important role in the whole story. "The right amount of cumin to stimulate appetite for life, a cinnamon quill to bring spice or action into stagnant phases of life, lemon juice to diffuse an argument, chilli to relieve pain and turmeric to heal the heart" (100 SOW 55). Each and every spice has the specific unique qualities to perform the magic.

Even her mother could sense the unpleasant situation of the family by the food get rotten. She warned Nalini about being cautious of Raul, by the food getting rotten. These reflect the foretelling power of the spices. As said, Raul had got attracted the minds and hearts of Nalini, and eloped. Raul and Nalini got settled in Mumbai. At first everything seems to be best for Nalini till she gets conceived. After her pregnancy, she had slightly drifted upon Raul and after her delivery, situations turned upside down. Nalini sensed the situations and called out her to come to her home in Mumbai.

Her mother came to Mumbai and made slight changes in her home. As the kitchen is in the worst hands of a maid, Nalini had faced such things. But after her mother arrival, she got perceive the life she once had with Raul. This shows that the usage of spices with devotions and the change of the charming hands to do the food could bring the pleasant situations in the family.

Nalini had faced many problems in her marital life. In fact her marital life was a failure. Raul had an extra marital affair and left Nalini and her children all alone in life. So it is in the hands of the Nalini to take up the wisest decision. She lied to her children that their father had died in an accident and convinced the children to accept the reality. Nalini is now responsible for bringing the child in a better way.

As the daughter of the cook, she had the devotion in her work and the magic in her hands. She started to make pickles and sold it in nearby houses. And the thoughts of ideas grew into big. Her pickles got sold in super markets, whole sale shops, hotels and so on. Later her idea of making pickles got into the business and it is successful. The food can help one to overcome in his life.

The spices and the food can give answers to the questions wondering over the mind. Nalini had a marriage proposal from Ravi Thakker. Though Nalini was ready to accept, she was in confusion regarding the acceptance of her children. She concerns for her children's future. She worried about her children's education and their future.

She had many confusions and question rolling all over around her. She says, "how would the children feel about it? What about the business? How would Ravi's parents feel about him marrying a woman with two children? How did he feel about Maya and Sachin? Did he love them like they were his own? (100 SOW 118). She has been placed in the despair.

As so many questions rolling all over her mind she is in distress and she needs someone to help her to come over. She picked the help of the spices and food. Even the spices could answer for the question quivering over the mind. She says,

"In cooking there are always answers. As I squeezed the fresh tomatoes into a pulp, I thought of saying yes to Ravi and then as I chopped and fried the onions, I would agree to move the family to Mill Hill but on the condition that I kept my business and perhaps with the deposit I had saved, I could lease a shop or an outlet where we would work from. As the onions sizzled, I added garlic, ginger, some turmeric and it seemed

better to wait until summer when the children’s school term would be over and Maya would be finishing the junior school and moving to new secondary school. fresh coriander and a few cinnamon sticks made it smell just right. Things would work out. I called up Ravi and said, yes, yes, I would be his wife” (100SOW 120).

Thus Nalini had chosen to be his wife for her entire life. Things got changed around as days moved. She lost Satchin in a car accident and Maya had departed to abroad for her higher studies. The spices had helped her to come over the pain she had on being part with her children. The spices are the soothing agent for her pain and wounds, and bringer of peace. It gave her courage to start up a new life whenever she felt she can’t. She opened up the new shop with new ideas and new fresh start. And it gave them the new way of living.

The spices, foods, ingredients were played a major role in the whole story. And the role it has taken place in the story is indispensable and insurmountable. The food had been the stuff for enjoying, and medicine for wounds, pains, bruises and so on. It had healed over the pains undergone and been the best catalyst to start the new life too.

Thus the author had used the food as a reacting agent for the situations and incidents that had in the story. The unique thought of using the food in literature as the literary device is something different and unusual.

The similar usages of food as the literary device could be seen in “The Mistress of Spices” by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. Here the author uses the spices as the major theme. Tilo the protagonist who is said as the Mistress of Spices works in the spice bazaar and uses the spices as the healing agents for the immigrants and performs magic in their life. The different spices are used for the different purpose in their lives. Each and every spices in the spice bazaar had a unique quality.

Similarly the same ideas of using the foods in the story are mentioned in “Like Water for Chocolate” by Laura Esquivel. The plot is slightly different from other plots. The protagonist is very much interested in cooking and baking etc. The main theme is the feeling in which she cooks get deepen into the food or dishes and the person who consumes gets the same feeling. The device of mixing up the food with the magic realism.

Works Cited

- Nair, preethi. *100 Shades Of White*, Harper Collins. 2003.
Banerjee Divakaruni, Chitra. “The Mistress of Spices”, Doubleday, United States, 1997.
Esquivel, Laura. “ Like Water for Chocolate”, Doubleday, Mexico, 1995.

S. Karthika, II M.A. English

Sarah Tucker College
Perumalpuram
Tirunelveli
karthikasaravanan318@gmail.com