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**SAVORING THE NARRATIVES FROM FOOD TO POLITICS: METAPHORICAL  
ESSENTIALITY OF CULINARY LITERATURE IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORKS OF  
INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE  
TULSI KRISHNA KASHYAP  
MA (English), Tezpur University**

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**Abstract**

This research paper deals with the ways by which food functions as a powerful metaphor in modern Indian literature, examining how it represents interpersonal relationships, cultural identity, and societal dynamics. Using a wide range of literary works from different genres and linguistic traditions, the study explores how authors can use food as a potent instrument to express complicated ideas and deliver nuanced messages. Food is a frequently utilized analogy novelists use to delve into more complex subjects and meanings. This culinary metaphor can shed light on characters, interpersonal dynamics, and the plot's overall structure while giving the narrative additional nuance and complexity. The paper explores the portrayal of food in Indian literature as more than just sustenance, transcending its utilitarian function to become a rich and evocative symbol. It studies how writers use food imagery to convey deeper meanings, such as political criticism, social stratification, and cultural nostalgia. By examining a diverse array of literary works from the Northeast of India including works like, *The Collector's Wife* by Mitra Phukan and Kula Saikia's major short story "Mizo Springs", this paper seeks to unravel the significance of food as a metaphor in these narratives. Moreover, the study explores how food shapes people and their relationships, showing how eating experiences can be metaphors for power dynamics, emotional ties, and personal development. The purpose of the paper is to decipher the complex levels of meaning buried in the culinary metaphors used by Indian authors through a comparative analysis of a few literary works. Additionally, the study explores the relationship that food metaphors have with issues like migration, conflict, and the shifting socioeconomic landscape. The paper also emphasizes how authors use the culinary world as a colorful canvas to portray the nuances of Indian culture, identity, and interpersonal relationships, providing readers with a sophisticated perspective to analyze and interact with the stories told in these literary works.

**Keywords**

Culinary Literature, Symbolism, Fusion, Composite Identities, Allegory.

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## **Introduction**

The use of food as a symbol in literature is diverse and nuanced, offering authors a rich palette to convey cultural, emotional, and societal themes within their works. We are all connected utilizing food, and for everyone of us, a particular dish or a home-cooked supper evokes a variety of deep-rooted memories. In literature, food frequently functions as a potent and multifaceted symbol with cultural and personal meaning. Tradition and cultural identity are closely linked to food. It may represent the traditions, heritage, and practices of a specific group of people or culture. Food is a common tool used by authors to delve into the cultural backgrounds of their characters and to evoke a feeling of belonging. Individuals' dietary choices might provide insight into their social class and status. It is possible to draw attention to societal injustices or to stress the characters' standing within the social order by using feasts, banquets, or the absence of food. Novelists frequently use food as a metaphor to explore deeper topics and meanings. This allegory of food can give the story more depth and complexity while illuminating people, relationships, and the plot as a whole. Literature may examine many facets of human cultures through the fascinating prism of culinary anthropology, which is the study of food and its cultural significance. The function of food in many ceremonies and rituals can be explored in literature. Certain meals can be prepared and consumed at religious events, weddings, and funerals in a highly symbolic way that conveys social and cultural values. Seasonal food customs and festivities may also be the subject of culinary anthropology in literary works. This can highlight agricultural methods, the cyclical aspect of life, and the significance of using seasonal foods in cultural celebrations. Ancient Indian epics like the Mahabharata and Ramayana offer insights into the culinary traditions of those eras. These texts mostly deal with epic stories, but they also make references to food, feasts, and eating customs that were common at the approximate times of their writing. The culinary practices described in the Mahabharata and Ramayana reflect the agrarian and pastoral lifestyle of ancient India, with an emphasis on hospitality, rituals, and a diet based on locally available resources.

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## Literature Review

In postcolonial literature, food plays a major part as a potent and symbolic weapon used by writers to examine intricate issues of resistance, identity, culture, and power dynamics. The culinary fusion presents a deeper understanding of the differences between the two nations. The blending of indigenous and colonizer cultures is frequently reflected in works of postcolonial literature. This is shown in the culinary arts, where classic recipes may blend with newly added ingredients and methods of preparation. This merging of culinary traditions serves as a metaphor for postcolonial cultures' composite identities. Control over food supplies by colonial powers frequently resulted in the exploitation of regional agriculture and the imposition of alien eating customs. The power dynamics involved in the management and manipulation of food production and distribution are discussed in postcolonial literature. Dietary hierarchies were frequently imposed by colonialism, in which colonized people were restricted to particular foods and colonizers had access to others. The literature investigates how this food hierarchy exacerbated economic and social injustices. In Indian literature, food is a significant theme of resistance, especially when it comes to colonialism, social injustice, and cultural oppression. Through the portrayal of food and its associated customs, writers emphasize how people and groups defy external forces and reclaim their identities. In Salman Rushdie's book *The Midnight's Children*, Saleem Sinai the protagonist who was born on the very day of India's independence lives to tell the story of post-colonial India. Personal problems, political unrest, and magical realism are all interwoven throughout the story. In one of the novel's scenes, young Saleem protests over his school's attempt to force him to eat sandwiches in the Western style. He insists on eating his mother's traditional Indian lunch, symbolizing a rejection of colonial attempts to erase indigenous cultural practices. The novel *Untouchable* (1935) by Mulk Raj Anand delves into a day in the life of Bakha, a Dalit who was considered untouchable in British India. It clarifies the economic and social inequities that the lower castes must contend with. There is a poignant episode in the book where Bakha refuses to give in to social pressure and purchases and consumes sweets. This action challenges the established social order and acts as a form of protest against caste-based discriminatory policies. More than merely a means of subsistence, food in these post-colonial works is a metaphorical and symbolic instrument that communities and characters use to fight outside forces, claim their identities, and negotiate the intricacies of colonial and postcolonial realities. The importance of food as a cultural symbol and a tool of resistance against different types of oppression is highlighted by these stories.

## Statement of the Problem

Recognizing that food is not merely a biological necessity but a powerful cultural symbol, the paper aims to delve into the rich narratives that emerge when authors use food as a lens to examine social, historical, and personal dimensions.

## Aims and Objectives

This research study explores the complex ways that food and culinary practices function as major literary topics. The research attempts to disentangle the cultural, societal, and personal components entwined in the representation of food through an analysis of a wide range of literary works. Using this investigation, the research aims to enhance comprehension of how the topic of food enhances literary stories and strikes a chord with readers on several levels. Often seen as the centre of the house, the kitchen is a powerful and symbolic location of resistance in literature. The kitchen is a common venue for writers to explore issues of identity, empowerment, and defiance of social standards. These are a few examples of how the kitchen



serves as a place of resistance in literature. Traditionally, women have been identified with domestic responsibilities in the kitchen. The kitchen is used by female characters in literature, especially feminist literature, to express their independence and subvert gender norms. Cooking and other culinary hobbies can be a creative and independent outlet for women. The act of creating new recipes, experimenting with ingredients, or adapting traditional dishes can symbolize a break from established norms and a rejection of conformity. The kitchen can be a microcosm of larger societal struggles and food is a way of voicing the unknown. The kitchen is frequently portrayed in literature as a place where political remarks can be made. Characters can express disapproval, encourage cultural pride, or take up advocacy through their food preferences, cooking customs, and shared meals. A place for social and political opposition is created in the kitchen. Characters may use the kitchen to subvert societal expectations and challenge stereotypes, as a form of rebellion against predetermined roles, a male character assuming the major cook job in a kitchen usually dominated by women can question gender conventions and expectations.

Northeastern India is characterized by its rich cultural diversity and by incorporating food as a serious theme in their works, Northeastern writers provide readers with a nuanced understanding of the region's cultural tapestry, social dynamics, and the intricate relationship between people and their culinary heritage. Literary works frequently showcase the region's biodiversity and rich landscapes by describing native ingredients, foraging techniques, and sustainable food sources. Food can be used by writers as a vehicle for bringing attention to environmental preservation and the value of protecting natural resources. Set in Assam, *The Collector's Wife* by Mitra Phukan provides insights into Assamese culinary customs. Using detailed depictions of regional cuisine, customs around food consumption, and the main character's engagements with her society, Phukan delicately draws attention to Assam's distinct culinary character, distinguishing it from the rest of mainland India. Likewise, "Mizo Springs" by Kula Saikia delves into the way of life and customs of the Mizo people residing in Northeast India. The novel sheds light on the culinary customs that set Mizoram apart from mainland India by depicting daily living, including eating habits and ceremonies. Food is being used to highlight cultural distinctiveness. Northeastern states are often susceptible to racial prejudices, constant stereotyping, and taboos. There are differences in the food customs of mainland India and Northeastern India. The differences in ingredients, cooking methods, and flavours are substantial, which makes people from different regions of the nation unfamiliar with each other's cuisine. This unfamiliarity could exacerbate prejudices and misconceptions. Food in literature serves as a literary and cultural bridge, offering readers a window into the culinary worlds of both mainland and Northeast India. Literature helps us comprehend the nation's unique cultural fabric in a more harmonious and interrelated way by exhibiting food as a unifying and joyful attribute. Personifying the communities they represent, characters partake in culinary activities or share meals. Cooking, eating, and socializing together cuts over cultural boundaries and presents folks from Northeast India and the mainland as people with similar lives and feelings.

In recent times, authors have shed light on the intricacies of postcolonial identities, resistance to oppression, and the long-lasting effects of colonial histories on the world stage through culinary themes. The blending of indigenous and the colonizer's cultures is frequently reflected in postcolonial literature. This is shown in the culinary arts, where classic recipes may blend with newly added ingredients and methods of cooking. This merging of culinary traditions serves as a metaphor for postcolonial cultures' composite identities. Romesh

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Gunesequera deftly incorporates culinary features into the story of *Reef* to illustrate the intricate layers of cultural fusion, societal change, and personal identification. Readers can acquire a sensory and symbolic knowledge of how food in post-colonial Sri Lanka reflects the dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity from the novel. The symbolic meaning of traditional meals and culinary practices lies in their ability to represent both cultural struggles against erasure and cultural continuation. Food is a tool used by writers to show how resilient indigenous societies are to colonial influences. Colonial powers frequently exercised control over food resources, which resulted in the exploitation of regional agriculture and the imposition of alien eating customs. The power dynamics involved in the management and manipulation of food production and distribution are examined in postcolonial literature. Triton, the protagonist, gets uprooted as he moves from a rural community to the city of Colombo. His culinary experiences mirror this transition in geography and culture. As Triton travels about the city, he comes across different ingredients and cooking techniques, illustrating how gourmet adaptation ties into the broader process of adjusting to a new environment. The culinary choices made by individual characters become indicative of their identities and the cultural influences they embrace. Characters may choose to adhere strictly to traditional culinary practices, while others may experiment with a fusion of traditional and Western elements, reflecting their responses to societal changes.

## **Analysis and Findings**

In its complete essence, food has developed into a dynamic and expressive component of pop culture, transcending its original utilitarian function. Food and culinary literature provides a forum for people and communities to express their identities, tell their stories, and take part in an international conversation about sustainability, diversity, and culture through social media, festivals, and culinary influences. Food is now an avenue through which individuals discuss sustainability and ethical issues. Pop culture has seen a rise in the popularity of movements that support plant-based diets, local sourcing, and sustainable practices. This reflects a rising awareness of how food choices affect the environment and a desire to advocate for moral consumption. In today's context, issues of food production, consumption, and sustainability are pressing concerns. Contemporary literature grapples with ecological consequences, ethical dilemmas, and the evolving relationship between humans and their food sources. Food is often used in literature as a diplomatic symbol, showing how shared meals or culinary exchanges foster understanding between nations. These instances are used by writers to illustrate diplomacy outside of official talks, highlighting the interpersonal and cultural ties that are forged over sharing a meal. Literature explores how conflicts, alliances, and geopolitical movements impact culinary traditions, placing food within historical and political narratives. Food can be used to trace historical occurrences, migration trends, or the effects of shifting geopolitics on regional cuisines. In conclusion, food is a rich narrative device used in literature to examine the geopolitical aspects of international relations. Fiction offers readers a prism through which to view how food strengthens ties between nations on a cultural, economic, and political level through portrayals of diplomatic dinners, culinary exchanges, and the fusion of cuisines. Future literary works might explore newer culinary boundaries and unorthodox food sources. As people get more experimental with their food choices, literature may examine the culinary, ethical, and cultural elements of ingesting new or unusual foods. Novelists can draw on readers' sensory experiences by using food as a metaphor in their works, forging a visceral and sympathetic connection while elucidating difficult concepts and feelings. The symbolic application of food will continue to examine

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wants, social challenges, emotional states, or cultural identity that will forever enrich the stories in history with deeper levels of significance.

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