

## **Quest For Identity Through Food: A Study on Amulya Malladi's**

### ***Serving Crazy with Curry***

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#### **Abstract:**

The quest for identity is one of the major themes of diaspora people. The diasporic people are in constant search of the “self” i.e. identity. Various cultural practices play an important role in the formation of one's own identity and food is one of them. Without a doubt, it is a fundamental identity marker. Food is as inextricably linked to one's psychology as it is to one's physical health. Many diasporic writers explore various which are connected to food. Amulya Malladi's *Serving Crazy with Curry* is one such novel deals with the exploration of the self. The protagonist of the novel is in the quest for the self, her own identity which she explores through food. This paper analyses how the process of cooking leads to the exploration of her own identity of the protagonist.

#### **Key Words: Diaspora, Food, Identity, Migration**

Food is not rational.

Food is culture, habit, craving and identity.

- Jonathan Safran Foer

Assimilation into a new community and the way of life, as well as the quest for belonging and acceptance on an alien shore, is a challenging job. The immigrants work hard to be recognized, but they are often victimized. They are in constant search for their identity; they are always in search of the homeland in everything which is been lost in the hostland. “Identity is a process, identity is split. Identity is not a fixed point but an ambivalent point. Identity is also the relationship of the Other to oneself” (Hall 20)

Amulya Malladi is a diasporic writer, born in India and has settled in Denmark. She has written eight novels such as *A Breath of Fresh Air* (2002), *The Mango Season* (2003), *Serving Crazy with Curry* (2004), *Song of the Cuckoo Bird* (2005), *The Sound of Language* (2007), *A House for Happy Mothers* (2016), *The Copenhagen Affair* (2017), *The Nearest Exit May Be Behind You* (2019). Her novels have been translated into many other languages. Amulya Malladi uses food as an important tool to bring the diasporic themes in her novels; *Serving Crazy with Curry* is one such novel. The author uses cooking as a tool to bring out Devi, the protagonist to bring out her “self”. Devi succeeds in her self-acceptance.

The novel *Serving Crazy with Curry* plays a major role in the transformation of the protagonist Devi. Devi is very depressed at the loss of her baby and her job. She hates herself and decides to end her life by committing suicide. She is saved by her mother and she is admitted. After the incident she becomes mute, she doesn’t speak to anyone. Later she starts cooking by adding twists to the traditional Indian dishes. She speaks through food and finally finds her “self” which is her own identity through cooking.

During her treatment after the suicide, the psychiatrist asks her to maintain a journal to write down whatever she feels as she refused to speak. She chooses Saroj’s cookbook as the

journal. After returning from the hospital Saroj asks her to have samosa and mint chutney. She enters the kitchen and starts preparing a new type of chutney using ginger, apricot, mint, and chipotle chilli peppers. The chutney came out well everyone praised her “Pride swelled inside her and for the first time in a very long time she felt a small measure of confidence” (Malladi 72). She named the chutney “Anti-Saroj chutney” (Malladi 78).

“The metaphorical meaning of food, which needs to be treated with care, therefore permeates into human relations creating similarities between food and human emotions” (Assella 132). When Devi wants to express something, she used food as a medium to express her emotions. “...Devi cooked outrageous meals every day. When she was angry, the food was spicy, when she seemed happy, there was a dessert, and when she bored, the food tasted bland” (Malladi 77). Devi later after somedays tried to attempt suicide, but she was not able to do it as she remembers what her doctor said; “Inside you there’s something that wants to live and taste and explore” (Malladi 87). Devi cooked very and she realized a closeness to her mother which was not before.

...She loved it. And she realized that she owed her culinary epiphany to her mother. ...

Her food tasted different from her mother’s but she had learned to cook from Saroj and that made Devi feel closer to Saroj in a way she never had before. Silence and kitchen had brought them together, and it was a time and place that Devi had to relish. (Malladi 133)

Finally, after four weeks Devi started talking after the doctor’s visit, she asks her father Avi to put her in a culinary school. When they return home, Saroj’s sambar and dosa await them. She enjoys her mother’s dish. “My memories of Sunday morning of eating hot dosas with

sambhar and pickle are vivid. I'm glad that I'm living here again so that I can learn to appreciate the one thing that I never did learn to do before: Mama's impeccable south Indian cooking” (Malladi 212). Devi accepts her Indian roots and the love for cooking.

Devi's desire for cooking finally made her come out of her insecurities. After stated cooking, she even forgot that she even has a baby. Cooking has changed her a lot and made her a better and a new person. She also found her “self”, that is her is been lost. She has developed a very good relationship with her mother. She has realized that life is not always the same. Devi eventually realizes that life isn't perfect and that she must make do with what she has. Devi takes full responsibility for her mistakes, starts to value her Indian heritage, loves her mother more, and most importantly, accepts herself, faults, and everything.

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