



Saving Spoon as a Beacon in Preethi Nair's 100 Shades of White

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Abstract. Women have been battling for so many things in their lives. The journey of their lives constituting vibrant roles as daughters, wives, mothers and grandmothers has numerous challenges to be met. The way they deal with these is highly commendable. They make use of all their assets—be it background, culture, values and upbringing. When it comes to culture, how can cuisine be left behind? It is an integral part of the culture that is associated with the womenfolk. When they rely on the cuisine it ensures their furtherance, giving them strength to move ahead. Their lives keep moving. This aspect like all the other aspects of life, are replicated in literature. How can literature be inseparable from life? We have literary gems who have penned touching treatises related to the repast. Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting*, Andaleeb Wajid's *More Than Just Biryani*, Khalid Jawed's (translated by Baran Farooqi) – *The Paradise of Food in India* and Amit Majmudar's *The Abundance* Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices* Meera Syal's *Anita and Me* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* and Vikas Khanna's the *Imaginary Rain* (outside the nation) are some of the notable novels. This paper would analyze how does Preethi Nair present the 'saving spoon'—the 'food' not only as a cultural signifier but also as a rescuer to her family. Her novel *100 Shades of White* shows how the pickles, a cuisine, saved her bacon.

Keywords: Beacon, cuisine, culture, resilience, furtherance

1 OBJECTIVES:

This paper aims to analyse the change that takes place in Nalini's approach to earn her livelihood in a foreign land. The purpose of this study is to study the evolution in the character of Nalini, who makes use of her skill to be financially independent. It explores the awareness among the alien people about the medicinal significance of the ingredients of food.

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2 Methodology

The paper is the outcome of a thorough reading of the text analyzing the thematic and the stylistic features of the novel.

The deep textual analysis of the novel has thrown light on the theme of cultural identity and the healing power of food ingredients.

The narrative structure has the use of the flashback technique also. Against the backdrop of diaspora elements the novel has been discussed as an inspiration to the other NRIs to have faith in whatever they have learnt and practiced.



Fig. 1. (PREETHI NAIR--<https://www.amazon.in/stores/author/B0045A50VK>) Introduction

A girl child especially in India and other eastern countries has many obstacles in the journey of her life. Her birth is almost unwelcome in the society where the son is considered to be the heir. Then she has to struggle for education. It is known how she is neglected and not given much preference over the education of her brothers. The Patriarchal dominance is always dictating her life directly or indirectly. Her duties as a daughter, sister, daughter-in-law, sister-in-law, wife, mother and grandmother is a never ending 24x7 responsibility that gets over with her life. Besides the household chores (that she has to undertake as her birth right duty), she has to contribute financially also. Sometimes she herself is unable to realize that she is a human being. Most of the times she forgets to understand her feelings, emotions and desires. They seem something distant and strange to her. The way women engross themselves and drench completely in looking after the family, keeping the tradition, and continuing the legacy, suppresses their own self and at times their identity too. Women have been battling for so many things in their lives. The journey of their lives constituting vibrant roles as daughters, wives, mothers and grandmothers has numerous challenges to be met. The way they deal with these is highly commendable. They make use of all their assets—background, culture, values and upbringing. When it comes to culture, how can cuisine be left behind? It is an integral part of the culture that is associated with the womenfolk. When they rely on the cuisine it ensures their furtherance, giving them strength to move ahead. Their lives keep moving. This aspect like all the other

aspects of life, are replicated in literature. How can literature be inseparable from life? We have literary gems who have penned touching treatises related to the repast. Literary writers of almost all the languages have written about the struggle of women in their writings. Whether it is poetry, drama, short story or novel—the focus has been on the woman. Their struggle, dedication and the ability to overcome the odds have been inspiring the readers. Films have also been made on the same subject. Some of the well-known works that reflect these are: Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting*, Andaleeb Wajid's *More Than Just Biryani*, Khalid Jawed's (translated by Baran Farooqi) – *The Paradise of Food in India* and Amit Majmudar's *The Abundance* Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni' *The Mistress of Spices* Meera Syal's *Anita and Me* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* and Vikas Khanna's *the Imaginary Rain*.

3 Theoretical Framework

Preethi Nair, a rising star in this series has also penned her opinion in this regard. Preethi belongs to India but stays abroad. She is a versatile personality. Known for her dynamic qualities, she has gained a lot of success and appreciation not only as an entrepreneur, orator but also as a writer. She took a bold decision to make her dream a reality. This was to leave her job and start writing. Nair has written five novels. She has also struggled to set up a publication unit.

Preethi Nair's intention is to inspire and motivate people, especially women, not to give up. There are ways to overcome the odds. This is what she has portrayed in her novel entitled *100 Shades of White* that was published in 2011 by Harper Collins.

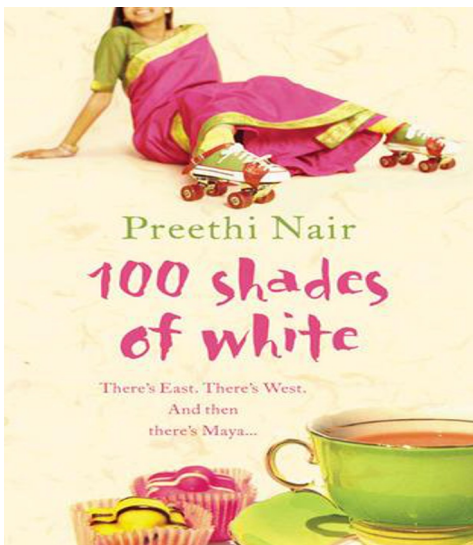


Fig. 2. (*100 SHADES OF WHITE* –Cover Page of the Novel)

Nalini is the mother. She has two children: a son—and a daughter—Maya. The name of her husband is Rahul. They had been staying in their native land, India. The head of the family calls them to join him in London. Nalini goes there with her children.

Her husband does not continue to stay with his family. He vanishes. Then Nalini has to bring up her children and earn her bread. Maya and her brother do not know the fact that their father has left them. They have been told that he has passed away. This information is given to them by their mother Nalini.

How is it possible that a lady of the house takes up the responsibility of the children in spite of being mentally and emotionally shattered?

It was not easy for Nalini to be so courageous within some time, to decide quickly what she has to tell the children and how she has to protect their tiny mental and emotional portion of their brains so that it does not hinder their healthy growth and development. How quick it was to compromise with her situation and takes a bold and positive step to earn a living or earn the bread for her children. Is it not resilience? It is also because she had seen her own mother in the similar situation when she was a child and her father had run away????

The Indian women have often being compared to the Goddesses and it is believed that they get inner strength to face the situations that they cannot change boldly. Hope it would not be incorrect to assess that Nair had anticipated about the entrepreneurship' or 'start-ups', that are now gaining momentum.

It was not easy for Nalini to survive in a foreign land without any financial support. She does not come back to India. She gathers courage to identify the assets she has, to face the challenges. What comes to her rescue is the 'food'. The art of cooking and in her case the tempting and delicious spices of India that are an essential component of a meal and act as appetizers too---the pickles. Preethi Nair presents the 'saving spoon'—the 'food' not only as a cultural signifier but also as a rescuer to her family. Her novel *100 Shades of White* shows how the pickles, a cuisine, saved Nalini's beacon.

This is what this paper is going to analyse.

4 Literature Review

This notable literary treatise has been researched by the scholars with various angles. How can one of the elements of culture that is food, establishes the identity of an individual (2) has been analysed.

The novel has also been discussed as a medium showcasing the empowerment of women against the patriarchal bindings. (5)

The cultural aspect and the customs pave the way for identification for Nalini, the protagonist and has been compared with Allen in *The Girl Who Chased the Moon*, by Sarah Addison (13)

It shows that topic of food, as a ray of hope during the crisis, has not been explored so far.

5 Discussion

Maya, Nalini's daughter, always remembered what all did she observe her grandmother had been doing in India, whether it was her cooking, her superstitions or her views. Nalini and her mother had always occupied themselves in this creative pursuit.

"They worked like two magicians and with smoke they could turn piles of vegetables and colourful spices into feasts." (P8)

Nalini's mother told the children, " 'You have to treat them (spices) with respect because they can do magical things'" (P14)

Maya further says, "The art of putting together food is a magical thing and if it is done right it has the power of to soften the most hardened heart." (P55)

The ingredients of food have a magical affect and the knowledge of the medicinal value of each item also brings popularity to Nalini and her mother.

"Just 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. Freshly picked coriander leaves tempered bad humour and gave a sense of clarity, fiery peppered rasam warmed the soul, and grated coconut added to many dishes soothed and comforted.....Golden beans added to vegetable thoran were for longevity and prosperity." (P55)

This is how Nalini recalls the medicinal properties of the spices that she had come to know from her grandmother in India. All are amazed to get such a significant awareness about these. Whether it is turmeric, cumin seeds, coriander, chilies or ginger—all are essential to keep the health of an individual intact.

Nalini prepares some pickles to get some more money. Tom, who had been helping in the purchases when her husband stayed with them, continues to extend his helping hand to the family.

“Tom came back saying that the family had absolutely loved the pickles and asked if they could order a dozen bottles.” (P95)

She further says, “Tom began visiting restaurants and shops, offering samples and, within weeks, we had more orders than we could have possibly envisaged.” (P95)

Gradually her pickles become popular and were in demand. It is astonishing to read how Nalini creates her own brand with the title ‘The Abundance of Spice’. This becomes the means of her livelihood. The nutritional value of the spices and the pickles was an icing on the cake.

The aroma of the sumptuous dishes always attracted one and all.

It was this significant element of the Indian culture that did not let these women to subjugate themselves before anyone else for any type of financial assistance.

Their efforts were crowned with a special reward—they had now an identity of their own.....

Maya who had started detesting the Indian food, also realizes later (after her visit to India) the significance of fresh and home cooked food that is prepared with prayers, warmth and love. So becomes authentic nourishment.

Thus, the words of Mandy Hale,

(“Strong women don’t play victim, don’t make themselves look pitiful, and don’t point fingers. They stand and they deal.”), assert that women are brave and capable of looking after themselves, raise their families and have their own identity in society.

In one of her interviews, Preethi Nair tells that this particular book of hers is the one that she has liked the most. The interview has been published in *The Sun*, on February 05, 2006, she has said the following:

5.1 “Which of your books is most personal to you, and why?”

All my books are personal because I was working through something in my own life while writing each one. However, *One Hundred Shades of White* means the most to me. It explores a mother-daughter relationship through food. I wrote it in a complete flow state over six weeks, and it became my most commercially successful book.”

(https://www.thesun.lk/solar_hq/From-Corporate-Suits-to-Creative-Freedom-Preethi-Nair-on-Storytelling-Identity-and-Courage/557-304764)

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