



Spoons, Smells, and Silences: Culinary Memory and the Gendered Kitchen in Contemporary Indian Women's Memoirs

Dhanya P¹

¹ Research Scholar, Department of English, Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit, Kalady 683574, Kerala, India
dhanyaparuthipully02@gmail.com

Abstract. This paper examines how contemporary Indian women's culinary memoirs—particularly those published after 2020—deploy food as a narrative and mnemonic device to reframe domestic spaces and gendered experiences. Focusing on *Masala Memsahib* (2022) by Karen Anand and *Fabulous Feasts, Fables and Family* (2024) by Tabinda Jalil Burney, the study argues that recipes function not only as gastronomic instructions but also as affective archives that preserve personal histories, familial inheritances, and intergenerational silences. Drawing on Hélène Cixous's concept of *écriture féminine*, Carolyn Korsmeyer's aesthetics of taste, and Arjun Appadurai's anthropology of food, the paper positions these works as examples of gastrofeminist storytelling that reimagine the kitchen as both archive and atelier.

Keywords: Culinary memoir, feminist food studies, domestic space, sensory memory, Indian women writers, gastrocriticism

1 Introduction

Modern literature, economics, anthropology, human rights, ethics, sociology and cultural studies have seen food as a crucial category for analysis. Food is getting an increased recognition as a deeply coded habit ingrained in power, memory and identity system and not just as a neutral or universal

necessity. Food does provide nutrition and are also socially and culturally patterned and extend beyond the individual choice or taste and the stereotypical representations present in popular media. Researchers like Arjun Appadurai (1981), Carole Counihan (1999), and Krishnendu Ray (2004) have shown how eating habits and discourses create cultural identity, mediate caste and class relationships, and encode social hierarchies.

Feminist food studies have highlighted the close relationships between food preparation and consumption and gendered labour, family space, and embodied experience within this vast discipline (DeVault 1991; Heldke 1992; Inness 2001). It addresses the problems of power, the inequality and inequity present in the structures and all the related -isms that advocate discrimination. It deals with various forms of oppression and privilege, gender, race, class, sexuality, ability, religion and age which are developed, seasoned and trained in relation to food. The kitchen has received special attention in this body of work as a location of both potential action and tyranny. The kitchen, where women's responsibilities as chefs and care givers may simultaneously reinforce patriarchal norms and provide avenues for creative and emotional expression, has received special attention in this body of work as a space of both oppression and potential action. As Marianne Elizabeth Lien in her work *The Politics of Food: An Introduction* states, "Food is politicized not only as a commodity for consumption, but all the way into the kitchen and the dinner table, with implications for cooking and family care" (pg. 4). Diasporic identity, culinary nationalism and gastronomy have been major topics of discussion and debate in Indian food studies. For example, Shoba Narayan places recipes inside autobiographical reflections on migration and belonging, while Chitrita Banerji's memoirs highlight the struggle of tradition and modernity in diasporic kitchens.

In spite of having discussions and debates, a large corpus of the scholarly attention is set in the late 20th and early 21st century contexts, focusing largely on the diasporic experiences and nostalgia. Indian women's memoirs produced after 2020 have received less attention in literary and cultural studies even though those years reflected a changed household and sociopolitical environment. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the kitchen became a prime location for care, resiliency and gender role re-negotiation. The pandemic increasingly brought in attention to the domestic cooking primarily associated with women and the performance of hegemonic femininity. In this setting, women's culinary memoirs have gained new significance as archives of affect, memory, and embodied labour in addition to being artistic expressions.

The paper focusses on two recent memoirs that highlight this change: Tabinda Jalil Burney's *Fabulous Feasts, Fables and Family* (2024) and Karen Anand's *Masala Memsahib: Recipes and Stories from My Culinary Journey in India* (2022). Renowned food writer and businesswoman Karen Anand places her work at the nexus of culinary tourism, culinary history and personal narrative. The author knits a beautiful tapestry of India's varied culinary traditions through recipes, travelogues and stories. While Burney's memoir discusses the intergenerational memory, the silences and the recipes that are passed down to the younger generations through stories and living together. When viewed collectively, these pieces demonstrate the diversity of women's culinary narratives in modern India, encompassing both domestic kitchens and international links, and emphasise food as a tool of resistance and continuity.

The main argument and claim made here is that food serves as a narrative device and mnemonic in these memoirs, encoding traumas, silences and affective inheritances. Recipes are "affective archives" that convert embodied actions into literary forms rather than just being cooking instructions (Korsmeyer 1999). Here, culinary writing is interpreted as a feminist epistemology that reclaims the kitchen as a site of cultural creation, undermines the hierarchies between literary and domestic forms, and inscribes embodied memory in accordance with H el ene Cixous's concept of * criture feminine*. In addition, the paper places these memoirs within larger discussions regarding the relationship between food, identity, and postcolonial modernity, drawing on Appadurai's theory of food as a site of cultural politics.

This work is significant because it highlights a new corpus of post-2020 Indian women's culinary memoirs in an effort to broaden the reach of feminist food studies and gastrocriticism. By doing this, it aims to contribute to three interconnected scholarly discussions: postcolonial critiques of culinary narratives as sites of negotiation between tradition and modernity; feminist analyses of domesticity, embodiment, and epistemology; and discussions on food and memory in cultural studies. In order to preserve embodied histories, articulate silences, and narrate identities through the language of food, the article contends that these memoirs reconfigure the kitchen as both an archive and an atelier.

The paper sticks to the following pattern. The first portion traces important discussions about food, gender, and narrative while reviewing current research in feminist theory and food studies. The study's theoretical framework is described in the second half, with a focus on feminist

epistemology and the sensory aesthetics of food. Anand's *Masala Memsahib* and Burney's *Fabulous Feasts, Fables and Family* are closely read in the third and fourth portions, respectively, emphasising how each uses food as a text, memory, and critique. Before highlighting their importance for modern feminist food studies and global gastrocriticism, the discussion synthesises these readings to show the common approaches and unique emphases of the texts.

2 Literature Review

Over the past forty years, there has been a substantial change in the way that food is studied in the humanities and social sciences. Once written off as an unimportant topic, it is now a useful place to examine politics, society, and identity. In his groundbreaking work "Gastro-Politics in Hindu South Asia" (1981), Arjun Appadurai identified food as a highly political medium that can convey exclusion, rivalry, status, and solidarity. Appadurai's work brought in a discourse and a debate in South Asian food studies by placing common culinary activities within broader systems of power and cultural negotiation.

The *Anthropology of Food and Body* by Carole Counihan (1999) and *The Migrant's Table* by Krishnendu Ray (2004) both highlighted the impact of food on identity formation, class and diaspora. When considered collectively, these pieces demonstrated how food is discursive, symbolic and socially coded in addition to being material.

Feminist food studies have underlined the importance of gender in the production, use and story of food within this larger area. Food preparation is a type of invisible labour that dictates women's responsibilities in households as groundbreaking studies like Marjorie DeVault's *Feeding the Family* (1991) demonstrate. Lisa Heldke's *Exotic Appetites* (1992) explored the politics of taste, particularly how women deal with "otherness" in eating habits, while Sherrie Inness's *Cooking Lessons: The Politics of Gender and Food* (2001) documented the cultural construction of femininity through food writing and cookbooks. Together, these scholars demonstrate how, rather from being neutral spaces, kitchens are gendered environments that lend creativity, power and caring. By emphasising taste and smell as aesthetic categories, Carolyn Korsmeyer's *Making Sense of Taste* (1999) offers a philosophical perspective and validates the sensory as a form of knowing long disregarded in Western epistemologies while in the Indian context, scholarship has generally concentrated on gastronomy, culinary nationalism, and diasporic identity. By combining recipes with

historical reflection, Chitrita Banerji explores how food symbolizes and traces religious devotion, the traditions and rituals, cultural inheritance, and regional originality in her memoirs, such as *Feeding the Gods* (2006) and *Land of Milk and Honey* (2009). Even in Shoba Narayan's *Monsoon Diary* (2004), food is arranged as a cultural marker and personal memory, particularly in diasporic circumstances. In Parama Roy's *Alimentary Tracts* (2010), which explores how South Asian food writing expresses colonial encounters and postcolonial identities, this route is expanded into literary criticism. When taken as a whole, these works show the richness of Indian culinary narratives, but they have primarily focused on diasporic experiences and memoirs published prior to 2020.

Recent research has also recognised the potential of food writing as a form of life writing. This paradigm has been extended to culinary memoirs by critics who argue that recipes serve as autobiographical fragments—embodied testimony of memory, heredity, and affect. Life writing has been theorised by academics such as Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2010) as a method of self-construction. Anita Mannur (2019) and Priya Srinivasan (2017) have examined how diasporic women utilise culinary writing to negotiate identity in the South Asian context, emphasising its significance in both continuity and resistance. Nevertheless, despite these insights, there hasn't been much scholarly discourse on culinary memoirs written by Indian women in the last five years.

This discrepancy is particularly significant because the COVID-19 pandemic changed household space and elevated the significance of food as a tool of care, resistance, and cultural transmission. Post-2020 memoirs, which highlight the kitchen as a storehouse of feminist activity, memory, and survival rather than merely a location of drudgery, reflect these shifts. Karen Anand's *Masala Memsahib* (2022) and Tabinda Jalil Burney's *Fabulous Feasts, Fables and Family* (2024), which describe stories of travel, inheritance, affect, silence, and recipes, are the best examples of this change. As a result, while earlier studies have demonstrated the cultural, feminist, and diasporic significance of food writing, they have not yet adequately addressed the expanding corpus of culinary memoirs written by Indian women beyond 2020. This essay seeks to bridge that gap by situating these memoirs within feminist food studies and gastrocriticism and emphasising how they transform the kitchen into a furnace of cultural memory and political relevance.

3 Theoretical Framework

The intersection of feminist philosophy, aesthetics, and cultural culinary studies forms the basis of this study. Its main conceptual lens is Hélène Cixous' idea of *écriture féminine* which emphasises physical, emotive, and disruptive forms of writing as forms of female resistance.

According to Cixous, the hierarchical binaries like the mind and the body, the masculine and the feminine, the domestic and the literary are opposed by writing through and with the body. The experiences, affect and embodiment are seen as valid sources of knowledge through which the opposition is made. Through the *écriture féminine*, the writing does not remain chained with the western phallogocentric rationalism and has a certain sense of fluidity, which only women could bring about. When we examine and interpret the culinary life writings through this perspective, the recipes and food narratives become not just literary artefacts but epitaphs of knowledge production, embodied memory and tools of feminist epistemology. This perspective suggests that women articulate embodied experience through culinary narratives, where sensory modes such as taste, smell, and tactility function as legitimate ways of knowing.

This feminist foundation is further reflected upon and expanded by Carolyn Korsmeyer's philosophical idea of taste and the aesthetics in *Making Sense of Taste*. Korsmeyer discusses food as art and challenges the assumption that taste cannot be evaluated by the objective criteria typically associated with "serious" art, an assumption she explicitly contests. Korsmeyer ultimately advances a sustained defence of taste as a philosophically significant sense and of food as a legitimate object of philosophical inquiry, arguing that culinary practices and sensory experience are crucial to the formation and maintenance of community, the production of meaning, and the cultivation of reflective self-awareness. By understanding the epistemic potential of sensory experience, she propounds how food writing becomes both personal and theoretical: memoirs that record the different smells, flavours, aromas, culinary gestures that create epistemes of knowledge. Korsmeyer's examination of the Indian women's culinary memoirs shows how the aesthetics of the senses conciliate the narrative structure and the affective memory, transforming the transient encounters into literary masterpieces.

Arjun Appadurai's anthropology of food places these memories in the context of culture and politics. In "Gastro-Politics in Hindu South Asia," Appadurai demonstrates the relationship between eating habits and power,

hierarchy, and cultural identity (1981). His findings provide a lens through which to examine the ways in which Indian women's culinary narratives convey heritage, modernity, and class. More than just personal recollections, memoirs like Burney's *Fabulous Feasts, Fables and Family* and Anand's *Masala Memsahib* are a part of broader cultural political discourses that take into account gendered domestic practices, foreign interactions, and India's geographical variety.

The three theoretical frameworks – Helene Cixous' *écriture féminine*, Korsmeyer's aesthetics of taste and Arjun Appadurai's concept of *gastro-politics* provides the ground for the study. Cixous anchors this inquiry within feminist philosophy by framing food writing as an embodied epistemic practice. Korsmeyer extends this framework by foregrounding sensory experience as a legitimate mode of cognition, thereby affirming taste and smell as critical categories of analysis. Appadurai, in turn, situates such narratives within the broader terrain of cultural politics, demonstrating how questions of identity, tradition, and power are negotiated through everyday domestic practices. Taken together, this triangulated framework enables a nuanced reading of contemporary Indian women's culinary memoirs as texts that are simultaneously intimate, sensory, and politically inflected.

4 Analysis: Case Study I – Masala Memsahib (2022)

Karen Anand's memoir *Masala Memsahib: Recipes and Stories from My Culinary Journey in India* provided a significant impact in the culinary memoirs published post 2020. Anand's travels and profession as a culinary entrepreneur deeply impacted the stories, travelogues, opinions on regional cuisines. The experiences and tastings that she did during her travels are recorded and intertwined into stories and recipes. It is a perfect illustration of how autobiography, culinary ethnography and cultural history is used in food writing.

4.1 Food as Registers of Culinary Journeys

Masala Memsahib is based on Karen Anand's experiences of travel and how food is seen as a storehouse of human experiences. Many different cuisines from different parts of India, like the Goan, Maharashtrian, Kashmiri, Bengali, Kerala are introduced to Anand during her journey. She describes these experiences with recipes and anecdotes from her own life. Anand in her work reminisces, "I started cooking European food and experimenting with ingredients available in India. I became known professionally as 'the

Salad Queen' because of my specialty- salads" (Anand 5). According to Cixous's *écriture féminine*, her writing represents a society that disapproves of rigid distinctions between experience and text. The recipes are not seen as just mere formula-based instructions but narratives and stories laced with memories with sensory descriptions evoking embodied experience and ingredients holding affective weight. She has a distinct understanding of "the essence of each spice and the flavour it brings to a dish is key to adapting it to any ingredient" (Anand 5). For instance, a Goan curry recipe is based on recollections of coastal kitchens, the sounds of spice markets, and the companionship of shared meals rather than merely a set of measures. Karen Anand recollects, "Madhur Jaffrey her recipes were amazingly accurate and brought Indian cooking out of the restaurant and into the kitchen...I learnt to follow flavours and not just instructions" (Anand 4).

This storytelling technique turns recipes into "affective archives," preserving both personal memory and cultural information at the same time. Based on Korsmeyer's aesthetics of taste, these paragraphs show how sensory perception—taste, smell, and texture—functions as a legitimate epistemic category. By arguing that tastes are complex, sensitive, and context-dependent rather than being reduced to basic statistics, Anand emphasises that embodied experience is crucial to knowledge.

4.2 Negotiating Gender and Domesticity

Gender is nevertheless a major undercurrent in Anand's story, despite the fact that it is less grounded in the intimate domestic kitchen than more conventional food memoirs. The conflict between domestic expectations and professional power is negotiated in her story. Anand places herself both inside and outside of conventional gender stereotypes as she describes her experiences as a woman navigating India's male-dominated food industry. "I grew up in London in the sixties and seventies with a mother who cooked because she had to, not because she wanted to, and a father who never entered the kitchen except to eat. They argued and bickered and my mother never forgave him for bringing her to 'this cold country' but they were completely united in one thing- their love for Indian food and the fact that they missed it" (3). In her narrative, the kitchen serves as both a home and a professional space, which she enters as a critic, entrepreneur, and cultural mediator.

Helene Cixous' focuses on women gaining a voice and a language through their writing to include the lived experiences into a cultural discourse with

their repositioning. Here in Masala Memsahib Karen Anand not only adds to the repository of traditional culinary recipes but finds a space by actively developing the existing culinary knowledge system. Arjun Appadurai too challenges the customs and hierarchies of the South Asian culinary customs in his work on gastro-politics. The hierarchies that Appadurai finds in South Asian culinary customs are challenged in his book, especially the ways that authority in gastronomy is frequently gendered male. Anand challenges these inequalities by sharing her culinary journey, highlighting the role of women in influencing modern Indian cuisine culture.

4.3 Culinary Cosmopolitanism and Postcolonial Modernity

Additionally, Masala Memsahib employs the use of food, recipes and the experiences with it for the amalgamation of postcolonial modernity and cosmopolitan interactions. Karen Anand becomes both an insider as well as an outsider. She was born in India but lived her life in the UK and follows the international culinary trends. But she does place Indian cuisines beside the international culinary trends by going back to the known flavours by keeping in mind the ingredient availability. In addition to placing Indian foods within international culinary circuits, she writes with appreciation for regional uniqueness. Karen Anand remembers, “cooking Indian food has been an acquired skill for me. Even though I grew up in a home fond of traditional Indian food, there were no ‘grandmas’ around. My first professional training was in French cooking, and I applied those skills sets to document interesting Indian recipes. This gave me the confidence to write a book for both novices and intermediary cooks who have a basic understanding of cooking and a passion for Indian food” (Anand 5). Such cookbooks can strengthen ties to the old country or even old set of traditions and ensure that the next generation of women will know how to cook foods of their mothers even if they did not learn it from their mother’s kitchens. The “gastro-politics” of contemporary India, where food mediates issues of authenticity, hybridity, and cultural prestige, is reflected in this dual viewpoint, according to Appadurai.

Anand’s memoir challenges purist definitions of “authentic Indian cuisine” by incorporating recipes that incorporate both ancient methods and modern ideas. For example, she unravels “the origins and name of the chilli, its potency and how much really a ‘handful’ weighed. For, as is with Indian cooking, ‘andaaz’ or an estimation is the consistent form of measurement across the subcontinent” (Anand 6). It rather portrays culinary identity as dynamic, dialogic, and hybrid. Because it challenges essentialised ideas of tradition and demonstrates how women may assert authority in reframing

culinary modernity, this position is important in feminist food studies. As a result, her story goes beyond the personal to address national and international conversations around Indian cuisine.

4.4 Recipes as Narrative Form

Equally significant is Masala Memsahib's formal structure. Anecdotes, musings, and cultural criticism are threaded across recipes to create a narrative rhythm that defies linearity. In this way, the text is reminiscent of the fragmented, embodied style that Cixous identifies with *écriture féminine*. Anand in Masala Memsahib recollects "It resulted in a unique Goan lifestyle and cuisine quite distinct from other parts of the country" (Anand 12). Anand reminisces how the land is "a world where both Portuguese dishes and (Gaud) Saraswat kitchens have secrets to share" (Anand 13). Recipes operate simultaneously as utilitarian directives and as literary fragments, with each entry gesturing toward moments of memory, encounter, and affect. The oscillation between procedural instruction and reflective commentary foregrounds writing and cooking as parallel practices of care, creativity, and narrative construction. Anand reflects upon how "Masala Memsahib is a collection of my favourite home-style recipes from India, steeped in tradition, some hidden secrets and some twists- they span my journeys through this vast country over the last thirty-five years" (Anand 6).

According to Korsmeyer, this kind of writing validates taste and scent as artistic sensations deserving of literary portrayal. Instead of just listing ingredients, Anand emphasises the sensory, urging readers to "feel" sensations rather than precisely replicate them. By putting affect and intuition ahead of strict code, this rejection of accuracy might be interpreted as a female challenge to culinary authority.

4.5 Conclusion: Repositioning the Kitchen

The kitchen in Masala Memsahib is now used as both an atelier and an archive. In the sense that recipes preserve cultural legacies, geographical variations, and individual recollections, it functions as an archive. It is an atelier because it is a place of experimentation, creativity, and storytelling. In addition to reclaiming food writing as a feminist form of expression and placing Indian cuisines into global circuits of taste and identity, Anand's narrative questions the gendered hierarchies of culinary authority. Anand's work clearly portrays how writing about a women's culinary experience

through her travels and tastings can become a form of feminist resistance and cultural critique.

5 Analysis: Case Study II – Fabulous Feasts, Fables and Family (2024)

Tabinda Jalil Burney's food memoir *Fabulous Feasts, Fables and Family* paints a different picture compared to the one by Karen Anand. The setting is more intimate- the registers of domestic life, the stories and tales about food exchanged within the household and an intergenerational memory passed down through the generations. In Burney's memoir, food emerges as both a narrative vehicle and a form of inheritance, with recipes operating as repositories of cultural memory, intergenerational silences, and embodied affect transmitted across time.

5.1 Food as Family's Remembrance

Burney's memoir is based on the idea that food maintains not just bodies but also stories. The recipes are jotted down in such a way that the cooking instructions are entwined with stories and memories. Burney recollects how "some of the dishes were made by extremely talented home cooks, ladies from our extended family, who cooked a special dish to bring over...aunt or grand-aunt would always make it. The recipes for these would have been closely guarded and passed down through the generations, but no one used a recipe book or even measured out quantities" (Burney xviii). This exemplifies what Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2010) call the fragmentary form of life writing: rather than appearing as a linear chronology, memory appears as a collection of embodied fragments. Burney claims that family eating and cooking customs serve as a medium for passing down, preserving, and reinterpreting family history. This framework allows Burney's work to connect with Cixous's sculpture. Combining stories and recipes shows a rejection of strict classifications: private/public, domestic/intellectual, and culinary/literary. Measuring, tasting, stirring, and other cooking movements are translated into textual forms through the embodied act of writing. "The haath ka maza is common to all home cooks celebrated in this book. And that ultimately comes down to a passion for and deep understanding of food and cooking. One who thinks of cooking as not a chore or dreary hardship but as an act of love, a badge of pride, a desire to please and soothe, and a gift for those we cherish" (Burney 117). By arguing that feeling and embodiment are legitimate ways of knowing, this feminised writing style challenges dominant epistemologies that prioritise abstraction over experience.

5.2 Silences and Intergenerational Transmission

Silence is a recurrent theme in *Fabulous Feasts, Fables, and Family*: the unsaid histories that food alludes to but is unable to fully express. There are frequently gaps in recipes that have been passed down through the centuries, such as incomplete measurements, directions that are only partially recalled, or unrecorded anecdotes. “The recipes for these would have been closely guarded and passed down through the generations, but no one used a recipe book or even measured out quantities” (xviii).

Burney highlights the subjective effort of recreating memory through food by turning these silences into narrative material. “As for jam, Amma is an expert jam maker...It is quite a fun game to try to discover what kind of fruit has been used in a bottle of jam. Amma airily dismisses it with ‘mixed fruit’, which means she threw in all kinds of fruit that she had on hand” (Burney 6-7). Here, there are no clear written instructions but Korsmeyer’s idea of taste and smell serve as epistemic registers. This bridges the gap that’s created by the lost paperwork or missing voices. Burney remembers how her grandmother taught her different recipes but the exact amounts of salt or sugar were never recorded. It was all based on ‘andaaza’ and they relied on the ‘haath ka maza’. Knowledge was transmitted through the “measures” of the texture of dough under the touch or the aroma of spices roasting in the pan. “Of course, these ladies also possessed that magic touch that transforms an ordinary dish into something spectacular and perfect. It is called haath ka maza, or the special skill of the person creating that dish, a result of many years of practice, patience and attention to detail. These are my true food heroes” (Burney 154). This demonstrates how women’s culinary knowledge is frequently passed down through embodied experience as opposed to written codification. Every home also has its own special recipes and customs. “The household could by no means be called a traditional Muslim household, but there were many habits and customs that we, as a family, adapted to our lives, over the generations. Our provenance asserts itself from time to time in the food we eat and relish, the figures of speech...” (xvi). Burney’s choice to record these recipes in the form of a memoir turns fleeting gestures into timeless writings, turning silence into speech.

5.3 Food, Gender, and Care

The politics of gendered labour are also a major theme in Burney's memoir. Burney emphasises the home kitchen as the centre of women's care and creation, in contrast to Anand, whose story negotiates authority in public cooking venues. She does not, however, portray this as passive imprisonment. "Some of the dishes were made by extremely talented home cooks...Each such triumph would further seal their status of completely 'owning' that dish..." (xvii–xviii). This ownership is both limiting and liberating. It reinforces gendered divides of cultural labour by granting symbolic capital, or acknowledgement within the family, but limiting that recognition to the home. Rather, the narrative emphasises the kitchen's dual role as a place of unpaid, unseen labour as well as a place of cultural agency where women express their identities, transfer legacy, and create meaning. Burney reminisces how "the elaborate preparations could be tedious and time-consuming, but we felt a huge sense of achievement afterwards" (Burney 91). Helene Cixous appeal for women to write their bodies into words is relevant in this context. Burney's writing affirms the corporeal rhythms of domestic cooking as epistemic practices by inscribing them into cultural memory. In reimagining food preparation as a site of creativity and resistance, she directly challenges patriarchal structures that systematically devalue women's labour within the kitchen.

5.4 Food, Storytelling, and Cultural Politics

Burney's memoir though discusses stories and fables surrounding a family it places them in huge cultural contexts and addresses much larger issues. Burney through oral storytelling traditions fuses recipes with fables, focusing their function as a vehicle for cultural continuity. Burney remembers in *Fabulous Feasts, Fables and Family* how "Hosting the functions, delegating tasks and, in the process, bringing blessings for the house and for all those who attended was an act not just of piety but also required great organizational skills. We did not learn these at school, or, for that matter, later at universities. We imbibed these by observing, getting involved and completely owning them" (Burney 91). This positions her study in dialogue with Arjun Appadurai's formulation of South Asian gastro-politics, wherein caste, class, and religious hierarchies are deeply embedded in culinary practices. Burney's memoir gestures toward these dynamics obliquely, often through contrasts between households or through the telling absence of certain foods and meals. "Usually, a halwa of some sort would be made, pure and untouched while cooking to maintain its *paak* status (purity)" (Burney 157). Thus, food shapes identities in ways that go

beyond the private sphere and serves as both cultural negotiation and familial memory.

5.5 Recipes as Narrative Weave

What can be called a narrative weaving is enacted by Burney's memoir's formal framework, which alternates recipes, stories, and family anecdotes. Recipes appear as nodes in a larger narrative fabric rather than as stand-alone instructions. A meal turns into an opportunity to share a story from childhood, a fairytale, or a dispute between generations. "We invite our friends, share food with them or go out for a meal. Back then, it could be a celebration of the arrival of a season, the mango season, a child's completion of the reading of the same Quran or their first solid meal. But the concept is the same. Sharing good times, marking an event, bringing people together and making memories" (Burney 134). The oral traditions of South Asian households, where recipes and stories are frequently passed down together and inextricably linked, are reflected in this arrangement.

From a feminist standpoint, this interweaving of the story and the cuisine represents a sort of life writing that is resistive. By raising recipes, which are sometimes written off as "domestic writing," to the rank of cultural texts, it upends literary hierarchies. By doing this, Burney adds to what is known as a "gastrofeminist storytelling," in which writing and cooking are simultaneous acts of narration, critique, and care.

5.6 Conclusion: Kitchen as Archive of Silence and Story

The kitchen appears in *Fabulous Feasts, Fables, and Family* as a contradictory setting that is both private and political, characterised by both storytelling and quiet. In addition to carrying the silences of unheard voices, recipes act as emotive archives, transmitting identity and conserving memory. "Food not only nourishes our bodies but also our souls and minds. It connects us to our pasts, our roots and childhoods. It is deeply intertwined with nostalgia; the mere smell of seekh kebabs sends me into raptures, encapsulating those idyllic days of Aligarh" (Burney 117). Burney also reclaims how "generations later, they still have ownership of these dishes that they once loved to cook for others" (Burney 117). Burney's memoir is a prime example of how modern Indian women's culinary writing reclaims the home as a place of feminist action, turning cooking and remembering into a narrative practice that turns silence into voice.

6 Discussion

The readings of Tabinda Jalil Burney's *Fabulous Feasts, Fables and Family* and Karen Anand's *Masala Memsahib* demonstrate the various ways that modern Indian women utilise culinary memoirs to express feminist agency, negotiate identity, and inscribe memory. Both texts demonstrate how food writing may function as a feminist method of life writing, despite their disparities in focus and scope—Anand's international culinary encounters against Burney's personal family stories. Three overlapping themes—food as archive, the gendered politics of the kitchen, and the aesthetics of sensory memory—emerge from their stories and are discussed here.

6.1 Food as Archive: Public Encounters and Intimate Inheritances

Both the memoirs conceptualise food as an archive though they do so in different writing styles and techniques. Anand reconfigures recipes as cultural documents that chart India's regional plurality and cosmopolitan modernity by situating them within circuits of travel, cuisine, and professional exchange. Burney, by contrast, embeds recipes within narratives of domestic life, silence, and inheritance, presenting them as vessels of intergenerational memory. Taken together, these approaches suggest that food functions as a polyvalent archive, capable of preserving both intimate familial legacies and broader cultural encounters. In both cases, the incorporation of recipes into memoir form arrests ephemeral, embodied practices and reconstitutes them as durable written artefacts for future generations.

6.2 Gender and the Reimagination of the Kitchen

The two memoirs present the gendered aspect of the kitchen in two different ways. By establishing female authority and power in the professional and culinary settings, Karen Anand challenges and questions the male-dominated field of gastronomy. The recipe becomes a recipe not through the act of being given, but through the act of being taken, executed and eventually embodied. The memoir by Anand presents herself as a woman whose power goes beyond the home kitchen through navigating the conflict between the global culinary modernism and local traditions.

Burney, doesn't travel or go beyond the kitchen space but her home kitchen becomes a site of creativity and agency. She reframes cooking as a cultural activity that upholds identity and rather than as a passive job. Kitchens and tables are now understood as prominent sites in the production of subjects

through processes that are guided, reflected and contested by a variety of food discourses ranging across cookbooks, household manuals, popular fiction, cooking shows, food-blogs and still-life paintings. Both the memoirs thus show that the kitchen cannot be seen as a site of imprisonment but a place of feminist epistemology and cultural critique.

6.3 Sensory Aesthetics and Feminist Epistemology

Both the memoirs coincide at the point of sensory aesthetics. Though the approach taken by Burney and Karen Anand are different they both emphasise on taste, smell and texture as important elements of their stories. Anand transforms a variety of ethnic, local traditional foods into sensory experiences through her detailing of the recipes and the tasting experience. She positions herself as both a participant and a critic. While on the other hand, Burney doesn't have any written data as all her recipes are passed down through the experiences by being in the kitchen and the aromas of the spices and the texture of the bread are her markers. In both situations, sensory experience is recognised as a valid form of knowledge, supporting Korsmeyer's idea that taste is an epistemic category. By translating embodiment into cultural language, these sensory inscriptions develop into feminist writing.

6.4 Toward a Feminist Gastrocriticism of Post-2020 Memoirs

This paper advances the development of a feminist gastrocriticism of modern Indian food writing by comparing and contrasting these two memoirs. A framework like this emphasises culinary memoirs as active interventions into discussions about gender, identity, and power in addition to serving as archives of cultural tradition. Thus, Anand and Burney serve as prime examples of how Indian women writers of the twenty-first century use culinary memory as a means of feminist critique and self-representation, including traumas, inheritances, and silences into their works.

7 Conclusion

This study has investigated how two modern Indian women's culinary memoirs—Karen Anand's *Masala Memsahib* (2022) and Tabinda Jalil Burney's *Fabulous Feasts, Fables and Family* (2024)—deploy food as a narrative medium through which memory, identity, and feminist agency are inscribed. Drawing on Cixous's notion of *écriture féminine*, Korsmeyer's theorisation of taste and aesthetics, and Appadurai's analysis of gastro-

politics, the study has shown how food writing represents both an affective archive and a type of feminist epistemology.

Anand and Burney's comparison draw attention to the variety of food memoirs. Anand transforms recipes into cultural documents that confront modernity and tradition, placing food at the nexus of professional authority and cosmopolitan encounters. Burney, on the other hand, emphasises food as a medium of intergenerational memory and storytelling, rooting her story in the home and family. However, the reimagining of the kitchen as a place of agency and cultural critique, where embodied acts become literary and epistemic forms, is where both works come together.

This study makes three contributions to feminist food studies and literary scholarship by emphasising post-2020 memoirs. First, by focussing on a new corpus influenced by the pandemic and its aftermath, it expands on previous research on Indian food tales, which was frequently concentrated on diasporic or pre-pandemic contexts. Secondly, it illustrates how food memoirs can be interpreted as feminist life writing in which memories and recipes express traumas, silences, and affective inheritances. Third, it offers the platform for a feminist gastrocriticism that positions food writing as a political action as well as a cultural archive.

This study's ramifications go beyond the two texts it looks at. The food memoirs of modern Indian women provide fresh perspectives on how gender, domesticity, and cultural memory connect in South Asia. By looking at a larger variety of post-2020 memoirs, comparing trajectories across South Asian regions, or examining how digital food narratives—blogs, vlogs, and social media posts—reconfigure the relationship between food, memory, and feminist agency, future research could broaden this investigation.

This study highlights the importance of women's culinary writing as a vital site of cultural production by emphasising food as text, taste as epistemology, and the kitchen as archive. These memoirs remind us that the processes of cooking, remembering, and writing are intricately linked to the idea of feminist cultural memory. Rather than being peripheral or domestic, they reimagine food as a vehicle of resistance, creativity, and critique.

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