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**Food as Signifier: A Semiotic Analysis of  
Laura Esquivel's Like Water for Chocolate**

**Abstract :**

Food is something that we all share. We all have a relationship with food and attitudes toward food, from the very beginning of our lives. It is considered essential for the existence of living things, giving nourishment with its nutritional qualities. But far more than its nourishment value, food has surfaced as an object of interest when people began to see it as a part of 'culture.' In a cultural setting, different types of food, culinary preparations, eating events, and rituals, and food celebrating occasions are signs/signifiers that generate network of meanings. Food is now recognized as an important area of study, in literature as well. Representation of food in fiction is intertwined with the issues of body, power, gender, class, religion and experience. Recent interest in food studies has opened doors in literary studies to examine how the use of food represents complex ideas and deeper meaning in literature. In this paper, Laura Esquivel's 'Like Water for Chocolate' is taken for analysis. The food signifiers in this novel are analyzed within the framework of cultural studies.

**Keywords** - Food, Cultural Studies, Semiotics, Signifier

### **1. Introduction**

Food is essential, sometimes decorative, but sometimes it is suggestive of something deeper in the web of literature. Recently, food and culinary practices have had a strong foothold in literary narrations. Far more than its nourishment value, food has surfaced as an object of interest when people began to see it as a part of 'culture.' In a cultural setting, different types of food, culinary preparations, eating events, and rituals, and food celebrating occasions are signs/signifiers that generate network of meanings. Representation of food in fiction is intertwined with the issues of body, power, gender, class, religion and experience. This paper endeavours to achieve the far reaching aspects of food in the light of Cultural

Studies and Semiotics. The novel under discussion is *Like Water for Chocolate*, the debut novel of Mexican writer Laura Esquivel. The food signifiers in this novel are analyzed within the framework of cultural studies.

Cultural Studies is a field of academic study that finds its origins in the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (UK) and in the works of critics like Raymond Williams, Richard Hoggart and later by Stuart Hall, Tony Bennett and others. Earlier the term 'culture' was associated with the life style and behaviour patterns of upper caste people. Everyday experiences and practices of common people were considered as trivial. The qualifying term 'culture' is reserved exclusively for high culture and denied to the rest of the members of society, the actual majority, who are seen as simply without culture. This liberal elitist tradition is challenged by Williams in his works *Culture and Society* and *The Long Revolution*, Richard Hoggart in his *The Uses of Literacy* and E.P.Thompson in his *The Making of the English Working Class*, in the mid-1950s, which marked the emergence of Cultural Studies. Williams puts in his *The Long Revolution* (1961), that "culture is a description of a particular way of life which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour"(58). Embedded within this statement is a particular theory of culture, that is, culture or cultural artefacts expresses meanings and these cultural expressions can be found in 'ordinary behaviour', not just 'art and learning'. Williams' phrase 'culture is ordinary' has since become a slogan for the standpoint of cultural studies.

Cultural Studies explore the meanings of everyday processes, places and actions like communication, eating, and shopping and look at how meaning is manufactured and ideology is coded into everyday life. Cultural Studies is interested in the processes by which power relations between and within groups of human beings organize cultural artefacts (such as food habits, music, cinema, sports events and celebrity culture) and their meanings. Cultural Studies looks at mass or popular culture and everyday life. For Cultural Studies today, cultural objects are simultaneously 'texts'(that is, they have meaning) and events and experiences, produced out off, and thrown back into, a social force field constituted unevenly by power flows, status hierarchies and opportunities. All texts (television, fiction, pop songs, novels, films, etc.) are basically political and they offer competing and even contrasting ideological significations of the way the world is. Ideology is a crucial concept in the study of popular culture. Graeme Turner calls it "the most important conceptual category in cultural studies" (44). James Carey has even suggested that "British cultural studies could be described just as easily and perhaps more accurately as ideological studies" (34).

John Storey in his essay *What is Popular Culture?*, gives different definitions for ideology. In his opinion ideology can refer to a systematic body of ideas articulated by a particular group of people (3), (that is the explicit idea that a text or an artifact convey) or it can suggest certain masking and distortion, that is, it can conceal some realities. He also uses the term to refer to 'ideological forms'. This usage is intended to draw attention to the way in which texts always present a particular image of the world. This definition depends on a notion of society as conflictual rather than consensual. Texts are said to take sides, consciously or unconsciously, in this conflict. Storey quotes the German playwright Bertolt Brecht, who said: "Good or Bad, a play always include an image of the world...there is no play and no theatrical performance which does not in some way affect the dispositions and conceptions of the audience. Art is never without consequences" (4). Brecht's point can be generalized to apply to all cultural texts. Another way of saying this would be simply to argue that all texts are ultimately political. Subcultures, popular media, advertisements, clothing, sport, food practices etc. offer competing ideological significations of the way the world is or should be. Storey concludes by agreeing Hall's claim that popular culture is a site where 'collective social understandings are created'; a terrain on which 'the politics of signification' are played out in attempts to win readers to particular ways of seeing the world (4).

It is in this context, the ordinary culinary practices and food experiences become a cultural artifact, that which generate meaning and possess socio-political ideology during the production and consumption of food. Cultural Studies views such practices not simply as valueless objects and processes, but as potential producers of new social values and cultural languages. This investment in the 'popular' paved the way for new commercial trends, like food and culinary practices, to become part of Cultural Studies itself.

Meanings and values, and their exchange or circulation, constitute a particular 'culture' or community. Culture is about the role of meanings in any society; but these 'meanings' are never fixed; they are arrived at through a process of negotiation and exchange. 'Meanings' are processes of language and language here is taken to mean not just words or print but anything which would generate meanings say, speech, painting, photography, food or fashion.

As Nayar says, the preferred term to speak about 'meanings' in Cultural Studies, is 'representation'. Representation is the process of signifying (meaning generation), and includes the word/sign and its concept/meaning. Representation can be an image, a word, a sound or a concept. It uses these 'signs' in order to generate meaning (21).

As mentioned earlier, food is a language which possesses meaning, a representation in cultural studies. All food is cultural when it is produced, because man does not only use what is found in nature, but also seeks to create his own food. Strauss' *The Raw and the Cooked* is an attempt to demonstrate a logic of properties based upon the opposition between what is raw and therefore part of Nature, from what is cooked and therefore part of Culture. It is Levi-Strauss' proposition that, on the plane of food, the distinction between raw and cooked is the same as the distinction between Nature and Culture. Then, food is Culture, when it is eaten, because man chooses food products, however 'natural' they are, and that too, becomes a cultural choice. Through such pathways food takes shape as a decisive element of human identity and as one of the most effective means of expressing and communicating that identity.

Anthropologists like Levi Strauss, Mary Douglas and others see culture as a complex network of symbols and symbol system. They see culture as communication and representation. They are concerned with 'texts'. Foodways, for them, become texts to interpret and analyse.

Cultural Studies has complex and intimate relations with other academic fields such as literary studies, media studies, anthropology, sociology, geography, history, political theory social policy etc. Semiotics exists as an element alongside cultural studies, since it is concerned with signs and meaning making and representations in many forms. Semiotics began to become a major approach to Cultural Studies in the late 1960s, partly as a result of the work of the French cultural theorist Roland Barthes.

The basic unit of Semiotics is the sign, defined conceptually as something that stands for something else, and, more technically, as a spoken or written word, a drawn figure, or a material object unified in the mind with a particular cultural concept. The sign is this unity of word-object, known as a signifier with a corresponding, culturally prescribed content or meaning, known as a signified. It is generally held that modern semiotics started with the work of two authors: Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), Professor of Linguistics at the University of Geneva, who called his approach "semiology", and Charles S. Peirce (1839-1914), a philosopher at Harvard University, who called his science "semiotics". For Saussure, 'semiology' was a science which studies the role of signs as part of social life, while for Peirce, 'semiotic' was the 'formal doctrine of signs', which was closely connected to logic. However, nowadays the term 'semiotics' is widely used as an umbrella term to embrace the whole field. Many semioticians tend to combine both Saussurean semiology and Peircean semiotics in their work, especially in fields such as Cultural Studies.

Jonathan Culler, explains the importance of semiotics in his book on Ferdinand de Saussure :

The notion that linguistics might be useful in studying other cultural phenomena is based on two fundamental insights: first, that social and cultural phenomena are not simply material objects or events but objects and events with meaning, and hence signs; and second, that they do not have essence but are defined by a network of relations. (4)

Saussure's book, *Course in General Linguistics*, published posthumously in 1915, offered an important insight into the roles of signs in society:

Language is a system of signs that express ideas, and is therefore comparable to a system of writing, the alphabet of deaf-mutes, symbolic rites, polite formulas, military signals, etc. but is the most important of these systems.

A science that studies the life of signs within society is conceivable; it would be part of social psychology and consequently of general psychology; I shall call it semiology (from Greek semeion "sign"). Semiology would show what constitutes a sign, what laws govern them. (16)

For Saussure signs have two parts: a sound image or signifier and a concept or signified; it is crucially important to understand that the relation between the signifier and signified is not arbitrary and based on convention. This means that the meaning of signs can change over time. According to him, no sign has meaning by itself, and its meaning is always a function of its relationship with other signs. Words are signs, and the meaning of a word depends upon the context in which it is found.

Umberto Eco, an Italian semiotician and novelist, explains in his book *A Theory of Semiotics* that signs are anything that can be used to substitute for something else. He states that "semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign" (7). Semiotics involves the study not only of what we refer to as 'signs' in everyday speech, but of anything which 'stands for' something else. In a semiotic sense, signs take the form of words, images, sounds, gestures, food or any objects. For the semiotician, a 'text' can exist in any medium and may be verbal, non verbal, or both. A text is an assemblage of signs – constructed and interpreted.

Semioticians like Barthes developed Saussure's findings, using language analogously to explore and 'read' a much wider range of cultural signs beyond the purely linguistic. His *Mythologies*, published in French in 1957, offered a semiotically informed dissection of French media and commercial culture; a semiological/semiotic analysis of topics such as

margarine, toys, soap powders and detergents, milk, wine, plastic etc. What Barthes did was to show how semiotics, in combination with Marxist theory, could explain how these products were being presented to the French public and the different mystifications and hidden ideologies found in these presentations.

Barthes developed his idea on myth in a peculiar way, that is, he considered it as a second order semiotic system. He takes an already constituted sign and turns it into signifier. "A sign in the first system becomes a mere signifier in the second (114). So much so that, the materials of mythical speech (the language itself, photography, painting, rituals, food, fashion etc.), however different at the start, are reduced to a pure signifying function as soon as they are caught by myth.

Myths differ from other kinds of signifiers. For one thing, they are never arbitrary. They always contain some kind of analogy which motivates them. In contrast to ideas of false consciousness, myths do not hide anything. Instead, myths inflect or distort particular images or signs to carry a particular meaning. Myth does not hide things, it distorts them. It alienates the history of the sign.

Crucially, myths remove any role for the reader in constructing meanings. Myths are received rather than read. A message which is received rather than read does not require an interpretation through a code. It only requires a certain cultural knowledge. Myth is parasitical on language. It requires the meaning of the initial sign for its power, but at the same time it denies this specificity, making it seem indisputable and natural, rather than contingent. There is always a remainder of denotation without which the connotation could not exist.

It is only because of this remnant of denotation that the connotation can naturalise something. It is as if it needs the innocence of denotation to pose as innocent itself. Meaning is thus torn between nature and culture, denotation and connotation. It also has a tendency to empty language. It removes signs from their context, hiding the process of attaching signifier to signified. It thus strips signs of their richness and specificity. The function of myth is to empty reality of the appearance of history and of social construction. The initial sign is 'rich' in history. Myth functions by depriving it of history and turning it into an empty form to carry a different meaning. According to Barthes, Myth functions like a turnstyle which constantly offers up signs and their mythical meanings. The sign is emptied so that it can present a meaning (the concept) which is absent but full. Putting this on background Barthes widened the very notion of food, that it is not only a collection of products that can be used for

statistical or nutritional studies. It is also, and at the same time, a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations and behaviour.

In cultural settings, different types of food, culinary preparations, eating events and rituals and food celebrating occasions are signs/signifiers that generate a network of meaning. Food constitutes information and it signifies. Putting this on background, food and culinary practices in *Like Water for Chocolate* are taken as subjects of study in this paper to identify the possibilities of signification.

Esquivel begins each chapter of the novel with a different recipe. These recipes are more than just formulas; they hold, concealed within them memories and the dish prepared will be of major importance for the narrative, its characters and the overall development of the story. Food and the process of food production convey significant information about the characters and the politics involved in their actions.

Tita, the protagonist, is the person most closely associated with food preparation in the novel. The various recipes evoke memories about different events in Tita's life. Dishes serve as a signifier pointing to the important events that took place in her life.

Certain dishes are prepared at certain times of the year or for special occasions in De la Garza family. Though Christmas Rolls, as the name implies, are usually prepared around Christmas, in this cookbook it is associated with Tita's birthday. The memory embedded in Chabela Wedding Cake is the marriage between Pedro and Rosaura. Turkey Mole with Almonds and Sesame seeds is the special dish prepared on Roberto's baptism. Champandongo is the recipe that Tita followed to present it before Dr. John when he came to ask for her hand in marriage. Chocolate and Three King's Day Bread is the dish prepared specially on the day of Magi. The special dish prepared on the wedding day of Esperenza and Alex was Chillies in Walnut Sauce. While Christmas Rolls are Tita's favourite, Cream Fritters are that of Gertrudis'.

When Esperenza's daughter, follows these recipes, now in her kitchen, she is surrounded with these memories, with its wonderful flavours and aroma of the kitchen once dominated by her own mother Esperenza and her great aunt Tita. Recipes are passed through generations. Each generation adds a new layer through the events experienced in their lives. Each time a relative cooks one of the family recipes, a story is being told, a memory is being recalled.

Foods / recipes are a link that connects each generation. De la Garza family in Mexico is designed with the recipes which are special/peculiar for them. Every dish is prepared in a traditional way, using the family recipes. It is a factor that builds the community; that

assimilates each and every member in the family tree. Each dish produced bears a special sign indicating its origin in the tradition of De la Garza family. Food production often joins the family together. The ritualistic practice involved in some culinary practices helps to refresh the relationship between members of a family or a community. Whoever and whatever position they are in, all have to take part in such a ritual. Esquivel writes:

On Mama Elena's ranch, sausage making was a real ritual. The day before, they started peeling garlic, cleaning chillies and grinding spices. All the women in the family had to participate: Mama Elena; her daughters, Gertrudis, Rosaura and Tita; Nacha, the cook; and Chenchu, the maid. They gathered around the dining room table in the afternoon, and between the talking and the joking the time flew by until it started to get dark. (13)

Gertrudis, who ran away from the ranch later, comes back on the day that they cut the Three Kings' Bread. Thus food becomes a sign to beckon someone:

Gertrudis got down from her horse and as if no time at all passed, said confidently that since she knew it was the day they cut the Three Kings' Bread, she had come for a good cup of freshly whipped hot chocolate. Tita, deeply moved, embraced her and led her straight to the table to grant her wish. (161-162)

The renowned gastronome Jean Anthelme Brillat Savarin says "Tell me what you eat and I will tell you who you are". Food and identity are linked. Food plays an important role in creating one's self. Tita's identity, her self is intertwined with kitchen, food and culinary practices. She has a deep love for kitchen. It is said that: Tita made her entrance into this world, prematurely, right there on the kitchen table amid the smells of simmering noodle soup, thyme, bay leaves and coriander, steamed milk, garlic and of course onion.(9). And there begins her connection with food and kitchen. Tita is so sensitive and Esquivel refers to her sensitive nature by associating Tita to onions.

For Tita the joy of living was wrapped up in the delights of food. She comprehended the outside world through her knowledge of life based on the kitchen. Esquivel writes: Tita's domain was the kitchen, where she grew vigorous and healthy on a diet of teas and thin corn gruels. She developed a sixth sense about everything concerning food (10).

Nacha, the family cook, took care of Tita ever since she was a baby. She didn't know how to read or write, but when it came to cooking she knew everything there was to know. She expressed herself, her knowledge through the food that she makes. Her dishes and her recipes conveyed the nature and attitude of the person, Nacha.

Identity is linked with one's approach to the food. Eating refracts who we are. It is said in the novel that Tita has always been a good eater while Rosaura was a picky eater. Tita who ate whatever she is given is marked by her nature for any kind of adjustments. She was very patient and possessed a great amount of tolerance. It was evident in her cooking too. Tita could understand the feelings of her fellow beings; whether it be a small child or that of an adult person. But Rosaura was impatient and she was unhealthy too. She was not tolerant enough to digest and understand the complexity of food, as she cannot understand the love between Tita and Pedro. Tita loves food not with the feel of a gluttonous person, but she enjoys every dish and its preparation. She immerses fully into the act of cooking and eating. Rosaura, on the other hand fails to build a relationship with food, as she fails to build a love filled life with Pedro.

In the novel, Nacha and Tita have a deep understanding of the food. The two women have a relationship with food that other characters in the novel are unfamiliar with. A good example of a character who is unfamiliar with food preparation is Rosaura herself, which is expressed in the episode where she attempts to cook for the family. She follows the same recipes that Tita does, however everything taste awful:

There was one day when Rosaura did attempt to cook. When Tita tried nicely to give her some advice, Rosaura became irritated and asked her to leave the kitchen. The rice was obviously scorched, the meat dried out, the dessert burnt. But no one at the table dared display the tiniest hint of displeasure, not after Mama Elena had pointedly remarked: "As for the first meal Rosaura has cooked it isn't bad. Don't you agree, Pedro?"...Ofcourse, that afternoon the whole family felt sick to their stomachs. (11)

Rosaura fails in cooking; she fails in her life also. Her failure in her attempt at cooking foreshadows her own life with Pedro. She was a failure in developing a smooth love relation even with her children.

As said earlier Rosaura follows the same recipe that Tita uses to prepare the dish. But as the above instance shows, the recipe does not guarantee that the dish is created in the way it is intended to be. A dish prepared by two different people doesn't necessarily taste the same. Recipes also consist of what could be described as hidden ingredients. Tita possess these extra hidden ingredients. She has the love for the food and the much needed patience. Thereby the food she prepares are exquisite and she is able to build a good bond with others- those who consume her food.

Some food, its taste and smell have the power to evoke the past. A scene from the animated movie *Ratatouille* produced by Walt Disney Pictures provides one with the graphic representation of this take back into the past. In the film we see a food critic being taken to his childhood days when he tastes the dish, *Ratatouille*. He sees himself as a boy, eating *Ratatouille* along with his mother. Esquivel writes in her novel:

Smells have the power to evoke the past, bringing back sounds and even smells that have no match in the present. Tita liked to take a deep breath and let the characteristic smoke and scent transport her through the recesses of her memory. (12)

All the good memories of Tita is associated with food and kitchen: at times with Nacha, the childhood games in the kitchen, the trips to the market, the still-warm tortillas, the coloured apricot pits, the Christmas rolls, the smells of boiled milk, bread with cream, chocolate atole, cumin, garlic, onion and so on.

Food reveals information regarding the social position of a person and it also draws on the economic and political condition of a particular place. Earlier there even existed classification of food regarding the social status of its consumers. Presently, eventhough this demarcation exists, the sharpness of the line is light. Exotic dishes now take long strides on the menu boards of high class luxurious people.

The recipe Tita follows in the third chapter of the novel is for making Quail in Rose Petal Sauce. Tita had nearly forgotten it because it was meant for pheasants, and they usually did not raise it on the ranch. In another occasion, Chenchu describes Gringo one to boot, which is served in a lunatic asylum, as the most disgusting food in the world.

Esquivel weaves the story on the background of Mexican Revolution. Thereby the threat of the revolution always hung over the characters. Revolutionary army often made visit to the ranch and took everything they needed. Such a visit and its consequences are described in chapter five: "Pig was one of the few animals that had survived the visit the revolutionary army had made to the ranch a few days before. So they had to get every possible use from the pig" (80).

Eating and food are in a variety of manners intertwined with the sphere of the maternal. Mama Elena practices a matriarchy based on a model of hierarchical patriarchy: only her opinion counts, no decision can be questioned, her daughters, and in particular Tita, are treated like servants/slaves.

Mama Elena's behaviour is put in context when, after her death, Tita discovers that her mother was passionately in love with a man she was not allowed to marry. So much so that

she is jealous of Tita and Pedro's love not because it is wrong, but because it was something that she once had. However, Mama Elena, disobeyed the convention and resumed sexual relations with her lover, when still married to her husband. Her lover was killed before she could elope with him and leaves Mama Elena in a loveless marriage and pregnant with his child Gertrudis. Gertrudis eventually causes the death of her mother's husband who dies of a heart attack when the rumour of the identity of her real father reaches him. Mama Elena's milk dried up from the shock of hearing her husband's death.

Breast milk is the first food through which a child communicates with the outside world. It possesses something mystical in it that binds the mother to her child. Tita had been raised devoid of breast milk; devoid of mother's love and affection. But we see another instance wherein Tita, though she never has children of her own, she becomes more of a mother to Rosaura's children and even she breast feeds Roberto. The milk that she is able to produce signifies her love and affection towards the children. Dried milk of Mama Elena can also suggest that she is a castrating woman.

Rather than the figure of a loving mother, Mama Elena appears to Tita as a witch who wants to harm the daughter. On the other hand Tita sees the figure of a loving mother in the family cook Nacha. The co-existence of these two models of the maternal emerges in the novel via cooking and eating. Tita, a child prodigy in the kitchen, is also a child of the kitchen, since, the cook becomes her substitute mother who feeds her and trains her in the art of cooking. Eventually Tita's culinary ability succeeds that of a skilled chef. The power struggle between Tita and her matriarchal mother finds expression in the food she prepares and feeds. This becomes more powerful and explicit when Tita become the main cook of the family after Nacha's death. "With Nacha dead, Tita was the best qualified of all the women in the house to fill the vacant post in the kitchen" (4).

After tasting Tita's Quail in Rose Petal Sauce, Pedro commented it as the 'dish for the Gods'. But Mama Elena, because of her dislike and envy towards Tita complained that it was too salty. Though Tita excels in cooking than her mother, she neither admits it, nor encourages her. Instead of appreciating Tita for her creativity, Mama Elena punishes her if she makes some dish diverging from the recipe. She also, often comes into the kitchen to supervise everything and would raise her voice if she finds something unacceptable. This is evident in lines: Chenchá didn't even want to think about what would happen if Mama Elena came in and found that Tita wasn't helping make the sausage (79), No matter how hard Tita tried she always got infinite number of things wrong (85).

After having alienated all the servants, it is Tita in her role as the dutiful daughter who stays with her mother and looks after her when she becomes bedridden. To a certain extent, this leads to a reversal of roles where Tita acts like the sensible mother who tries to feed a rebellious infant rejecting her meals. Tita carefully prepares Oxtail soup for her mother owing to its healing quality. But her reluctance to accept the soup, for that matter, any food that Tita brings, suspecting it as poison, brings about her own death. At the same time, the same dish act as a nourishing as well as a poisonous dish.

Tita has almost developed certain “powers” because of her control with food. Esquivel exaggerates the reality that a cook can influence those who eat his/her food. In the beginning, when Esquivel describes the birth of Tita, she says that little Tita’s tears turned into salt under sunlight and was used for cooking for a long time. Esquivel foreshadows the influence Tita, the cook can have on those whom she feeds.

Tita is linked to everyone else. Through her cooking and food she controls everybody, knowingly or unknowingly. Her meals have more effect than what we usually experience while eating. In the matriarchal household she cannot express her opinions and emotions; she cannot exert her wish on anybody through her words and physical power. Food serves as a channel for Tita to express her unexpressed emotions and also to control those who take her food.

Tita had to suppress her sadness and had to attend the wedding ceremony of her lover and sister, Rosaura, despite her feeling. She also had to make sure her face didn’t reveal the slightest emotion, because she was strictly ordered by her mother, not to show even the slightest emotion on the face. Unable to express herself, physically and emotionally, Tita expresses herself through the food. Here in this occasion she expressed her longing for Pedro and the subsequent grief in the wedding cake she had prepared. Tita’s tears become an extra ingredient, as it falls into the batter of wedding cake. “The moment they took their first bite of the cake, everyone was flooded with a great wave of longing” (39). Literally everyone was under the spell. The wedding cake prepared by Tita, thus became the signifier pointing to her sorrowful state and longing. Again, the main dish, chosen by Mama Elena, to be served in the wedding banquet is capons, a signifier suggesting a wedding without sexual happiness, because the wedding between Rosaura and Pedro ends in the destruction of Pedro and Tita’s dream of a life together.

Another instance, wherein food becomes the signifier of Tita’s emotion is when she prepared Quail in Rose Petal Sauce. She makes that dish with full of love and passion for

Pedro, which she cannot express openly. After having the meal, the characters are overwhelmed with feelings of lustfulness: “With that meal it seemed they had discovered a new system of communication, in which Tita was the transmitter, Pedro the receiver” (49).

Tita communicates, especially to Pedro, through the food she prepares. Tita tried to invent new recipes, hoping to repair the connection that flowed between herself and Pedro through the food she prepared. She took elaborate pains to cook better meals each day, to express herself, to communicate in a language she better knows.

The title *Like Water for Chocolate*, showcases Tita’s state of mind. She felt anger when Rosaura declares that her daughter would follow the tradition and so she is supposed to take care of her mother. At the same time Tita also felt irritated by the attitude of Pedro upon her decision to marry Dr. John. So much so that Tita was literally ‘like water for hot chocolate’ – she was on the verge of boiling over.

Cultural Studies of food, with the help of semiotics, have brought a fresh lease of life to the concept of food by looking beyond the familiar notions that food carries. This emerging field of study has begun to articulate the importance of everyday processes in creating different meanings and ideologies within a society. Semiotic theory offers an explanation of how food becomes a signifier, giving out different meanings and ideas embedded within the ‘concrete’ food. Semiology translates food into the semiotic system as a signifier, in order to attribute meaning.

Thus, food sheds its identity as a concrete object or a sign. To eat or to cook is a behavior that develops beyond its own ends. It signals something else; it acts as a signifier rather than a sign.

The analysis of the novel, *Like Water for Chocolate* provides adequate evidences to support the point that food is a signifier. The novel contains relationships, love, hate, aggression, tradition and destiny that are all revealed through food created in the kitchen. Food connotes more than it denotes. Tita sees food to voice her joy, rage and yearnings.

Food is central to our sense of identity. The way any given human group eats helps it to assert its diversity and hierarchy. Thus it constructs individual, national and ethnic identities. Food becomes signifier that unveils the politics and power contained in everyday processes. Power relation between man and woman or that between mother and daughter gets well expressed through food and consumption. It also shows in detail that, the preparation and the consumption of food carries the signature of one’s own cultural and national identity. Food

expresses copious emotions: love, sensuality, anger, rebellion, violence and so on. It also acts as a signifier that evokes memory.

Food, cooking and its consumption is a very effective signifier that celebrates one's freedom and its expression. Some people, especially women, develops an intricate relationship with food and their perceptions regarding the world and life would be around food as it is seen with the case of our heroine. Tita tries to speak out through the language she better knows, that is through food and cooking.

Food, eating and cooking function as a means of exchange and take on the role of universal signifier. In order to attribute meanings to the experience of food it is put under semiotic analysis within the framework of Cultural Studies. Thus meanings attached to food cover an unbelievably wide spectrum of human existence. Food is, without any doubt, the most effective and powerful semiotic means by which many ideas, facts and emotions are communicated.

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