

**Cooking as a Remedy for Stress in Amulya Malladi's
*Serving Crazy with Curry***

Sophia Mary, Ph.D. Research Scholar, English

Amulya Malladi is a diasporic Indian writer in English and she is very famous for her seven novels. In Malladi's *Serving Crazy with Curry*, Devi Veturi the young heroine and protagonist lives alone in a flat undergoes a great psychological depression. In her late twenties she struggles for her identity and experiences a life of professional and personal failures. Devi attempts suicide but gets rescued by her own mother. In the beginning of the novel Devi has a verge to commit suicide, she creates a list on a spreadsheet having two categories namely reason to die and reason not to die:

REASONS TO DIE

1. Have disappointed the father and grandmother who love me
2. ~~Laid off again~~
3. ~~Completely in debt~~
4. ~~Can't pay rent~~
5. ~~Have had only failed relationships~~
6. ~~Slept with a married man~~
7. ~~Had a relationship with a married man~~
8. ~~Fell in love with a married man~~
9. Lost a baby

REASONS NOT TO DIE

1. Have a loving family (sort of, if mother and sister are not included)
2. ~~Have my health~~
3. ~~Hmm...~~ (Malladi 4)

The reasons that are crossed out in the list are the reasons that Devi found senseless to kill herself in suicide. But they are not erased, only stricken and this shows that she is still grieving over them melancholically with depression. Devi's losses did not take her to a simple kind of mourning but devours her own self accomplishments and self-developments. As Malladi states about the depression that Devi undergoes, "She knew that the losses she incurred had eaten away everything joyous within her" (Malladi 4).

Devi's desire for suicide pictures that her love for these lost objects especially her lost baby have turned into hatred on herself thus made her to contemplate but also pushes her to execute the attempt of committing suicide. When all her expectations turn into disappointments, the overwhelming frustrations lead her to the only final choice named suicide. Devi considers suicide as a personal business, a private affair and it is not needed to give any explanation to anyone, "Her parents may have brought her into the world (and that, too, without her permission), but it was her choice when she left" (8). Devi became self-destructive by whatever she recalls her affair with her sister's husband, Girish.

After her attempt of suicide Devi's parents took her to their home for recovery, after that Devi completely stops talking to anyone at the home and starts cooking. She expresses all her emotions only through cooking which clearly shows a critical transformation not only in Devi's personal life and character but also in her family. She does everything with intensity and consistency which made Veturi's family speechless. The stress and pressures inside her are well reflected in her dishes and in the ingredients that she uses. Devi portrays herself as a traditional stereotypical model of femininity by her cooking and silences.

In the beginning, Devi lived a westernised life she wanted liberty from her family. She wanted to be free and independent in her career and life, her father was her role model. She wanted to be successful like her father Avi Veturi, who was serving Indian Army earlier, then successfully started a technological company with his friend and gets semi-retired and enjoys a comfortable happy life in Silicon Valley. Devi also wants to be a self-made woman like her grandmother Vasu, who was a doctor in the Indian Army got retired as a Brigadier. Her elder sister Shoba is the vice president of engineering for a software company in her young age of thirty-two. Her husband Girish is an excellent man, working as a professor in Stanford University. Malladi comments this as "Talk about overachievers, her (Devi's) family was loaded with them" (6).

Devi compares her life with her mother Saroj. "She wanted to be like her grandmother: strong, independent, and smart. Instead she was more like her mother: a complete failure at everything...life, love, children, job, relationship, finances, everything" (6). Devi is also jealous on her sister Shoba due to her success in both career and life but later she becomes glad on knowing that Shoba cannot become a successful mother. Two years after marriage, Shoba undergoes a surgery for endometriosis and that result in her infertility.

Devi becomes silent whenever she was upset, because she does not want to tell anything to anyone, she finds it useless and she hates recalling bitter events, "After that Devi went into

silence mode for a few days..., whenever she got upset or whenever she didn't want to say anything to anyone" (62). First time Devi went into silent mode when she was studying grade four, she was accused for stealing her classmate's "one dollar and twenty- three cents" (29). She also broke her classmate's nose "pretty as Barbie" Lilly's nose for "calling her a thief and brown- skinned refugee" (62). She found peace in being silent, "Devi had found solace in silence... she maintained silence rather than defend herself" (62). Lilly's words meant more to Devi that she considers it as a truth inside her heart. Her racial grief made her to stop speaking, but it does not mean that Devi is subversive. Devi has experienced racial melancholia for the first time in her life.

The heroine Devi Veturi becomes very silent and engages herself in cooking as an output of her stress, depression and sadness. She conveys her emotions to her family only through cooking, here cooking acts as an agency:

Two things happened after the Devi "incident," as everyone in the Veturi household started calling it:

1. Devi completely stopped talking.
2. Devi started cooking.

Two things she did with such intensity and consistency that it drove her already shaken family up the wall. (12)

The kitchen was in the hands of her mother Saroj, Devi was never allowed to try cooking before, "Saroj lived in fear that Devi, Shoba, or even Vasu would put things away in the wrong place or ruin her perfectly managed kitchen" (70). Saroj considers kitchen as her great domain and cooking as her only way to feel her homeland India. But now, Devi disturbs the orderliness of the kitchen by her cooking but Saroj could not interrupt her. Here Saroj's culinary citizenship to India gets cancelled. Through suicidal attempt Devi got an opportunity to enter her mother's kitchen, "it gave Devi immense pleasure to walk into her mother's kitchen and start cooking" (70).

Malladi describes Devi as a closet feminist and the two daughters of Veturi are totally contrasted to each other. Shoba brings out her attitude towards the homemakers that they are happily sitting at home doing nothing. Malladi states, "Because Saroj never worked, both her daughters had developed a healthy disrespect for homemakers" (132). Devi does not voice her opinion as loudly as Shoba did, but she has not appreciated women who gave up lives outside their homes to be wives and mothers. It was woman like that, she believed, who made it hard for career women like herself to break the glass ceiling. According to Devi, "Everyone has to have a

role in society, and in her book of definitions a homemaker was defined as a lazy woman who sat home pretending to have a full- time job” (133). Thus, Devi emphasis gender equality in both family and in society.

Kitchen serves as a space and a personal stage to exercise creativity and to express identity. Devi gets a new experience, “She, who had never cooked, never been part of the kitchen militia, was a general now. She loved it.” (133). Cooking is an individual identity and also communal act that connects people across generational, racial, gender, regional, ethnic and class boundaries. Cooking is an art and it is also a stage to express a person’s personal taste and creativity. One’s nature, quality or character can be predicted by the food that he/ she cooks.

For Devi, cooking, creating recipes and new dishes not only acts as a way to come out of her trauma of suicidal attempt but also her childhood and her failure of post adolescence trauma that she maintained as a secret to her family. Her mother’s old notebook of recipes acts as an initialization for Devi where she found a goat curry recipe of a woman called Girija from Jorhat in India in the second page, “GIRIJA’S GOAT SABZI” (66). Devi identifies it as her mother’s famous goat curry that she never reveals the recipe to anyone and she keeps it as a secret. Saroj changes the name of the food from goat sabzi to goat curry because she wants to make the recipe as her own creation. The goat curry recipe was the first and last recipe that Devi found in her mother’s old notebook.

Cooking acts as a medium to pass cultural knowledge and wisdom from one generation to another. When Devi starts to write her own recipes in her mother’s old notebook, she not only creates a tie with her own mother but also starts her diversion and self- realization. It is the place where she really identifies herself. She really wants to come out of her stressful past. Devi’s recipes were totally different from her mother’s dishes. Thus, the heroine breaks the typical rules of cooking and innovatively thinks as a creator of her own world of dishes. Through the character Devi, Malladi shows that the changes can be brought in both food and literature because they both do not have any definite standards or set of rules that has to be followed appropriately. A change is more important to add more spices to life and to make it more colourful and interesting.

Although Avihher father trusted Devi a lot she violates everything by her Suicidal attempt. The first recipe that Devi created is the anti- Saroj’s chutney and it acts as a direct challenge to Saroj’s way of cooking chutney. She made it different by adding apricot and chipotle chili peppers. The other recipes differ in their unconventional tastes. In the beginning of the cooking the recipes are greatly unusual that they had unexpected ingredients like curry and blueberries and do not have typical elements such as ingredients list or numbered list of steps.

Devi however cooks more and starts to get good appreciations from her family. Her recipes are totally a contrast to the first recipe, in her mother's notebook, it was more contemplative and less instructional. In anti- Saroj's chutney Devi purely expresses her hatred and antagonism towards her mother. Her complex feeling towards Saroj is clearly executed through this chutney. Devi's Cajun prawn biriyani is subtitled as, "Day after coming home from hospital" (93) and her dosa with sambhar as, "The day I decided my future" (211). The turning point of this novel is Devi's lamb clitoris recipe because her miscarriage is revealed to her family through this. Jay, Devi's former friend and lover comes home and informs her family about her miscarriage when she is in a therapist appointment. Devi told him to keep this as a secret but after knowing about her suicidal attempt, Jay decided that it is better to tell the truth to her family.

Devi named "the recipe lamb clitoris as in honour of Jay, the clitoris, and of course the day when my wall of secrets fell apart around me" (163). And she gives the subtitle as, "The day everyone found out" (163). It is considered as the most sexual recipe in this novel because it expresses the heroine's traumatic feelings about her miscarriage. The death of the innocent baby and her affair and relationship with Jay and her brother-in-law creates a transgressive feeling inside her. The structure of the recipe is between her transgressive sex and the baby. The thoughts of the lost baby linger in the heart of Devi, her trauma is well expressed in the last paragraph of the recipe and her feelings are totally exhibited through her cooking.

Saroj's response towards Devi's secret miscarriage is entirely different and this brings a critical change in their relationship. It creates a great transformation in Veturi's family. One by one all other secrets come out as a chain along with this, the affair between Devi and Girish, the failure of Shoba and Girish marriage etc. Although Devi tries to rebuild the relationship with her mother, Shoba confronts Devi's affair with Girish. Then Shoba decides and undergoes some life changing events such as leaving her job, wants to divorce her husband Girish and to return to her parental home. Even though the two daughters of Veturi took different paths and decisions about their lives, they both end at the same point at their parental home. They both are in need of a new beginning and the support of their family to start a new life. Here it is clear that either married life or being single cannot fulfil the expectations of a young woman it can neither exactly tell nor define that what they really want. Thus, both the daughters did not receive the true happiness that they expected in their life. People think that marriage is the ultimate and the ideal goal of women, here Malladi challenges that myth.

Through the character of Devi, her recipes and cooking Malladi shows that women can enjoy happiness and contentment even inside her home. She also supports the idea of cooking ethnic foods and it is not gender limited that anyone can cultivate their interest for this great art

and cooking also acts as a way to reach one's heart. Thus, in this novel through cooking the heroine comes out of her stress and depression and it acts as a therapy and a tool to cure the young woman Devi.

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Sophia Mary, Ph.D. Research Scholar, English
Department of English
Sri Sarada College for Women (Autonomous)
Salem - 16
Princesssophia1993.sm@gmail.com