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Subversion of Tradition in Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate*

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**Letter of Recommendation**

Mr. Gopal Sharma has completed his thesis "Subversion of Tradition in Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate*" under my supervision. He carried out this research paper from September 2012 to December 1014. I hereby recommend this thesis to be submitted for viva voce.

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**Letter of Approval**

The thesis entitled "Subversion of Tradition in Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate*" submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Gopal Sharma has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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## **Abstract**

This thesis studies Laura Esquivel's novel, *Like Water for Chocolate* from the perspective of feminism. It mainly focuses on female characters and points to a more radical concern of feminism in this novel. The female characters are presented boldly, and strongly, who question the traditionally accepted feminine roles as the characters reject to abide by these roles. The major character, Tita as a youngest daughter, is required to remain unmarried according to the Mexican tradition to take care of her oppressive mother, Mama Elena. Tita rebels against her mother who upholds the traditional patriarchal Mexican values. She defies her mother's dictates by showing her love to Pedro even after the Pedro's marriage with Rosaura, which is not accepted by the society. Even at home, she takes kitchen as a source of feminine power as she ruins the wedding party of Pedro and Rosaura. Similarly, Gretrudis is the strong female character who leaves home, works in a brothel and joins revolutionary army. So, both sisters' acts reflect the subversion of patriarchal norms in Mexican society.

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## **I. Female Power and Revolt in Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate***

The primary purpose of this research is to depict the domination of females, their revolution and struggle for the freedom in Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate*. It basically seeks to explore the domination and exploitation of patriarchy in the contemporary Mexican society and exposes the effect of suppression. The main intention of this research is to show the female resistance against family tradition and to change the traditional attitude over female. It also attempts to break the rigid cultural tradition and rejects the old order's dictatorship it explore the repressive impact of tradition on women and a celebration of their willingness to break from tradition.

The project focuses on the females struggle to exist in their life. They intend to establish the liberation and equality of women as men by avoiding traditional norms and values which were not allowed in the then society. Despite this, they dare to resist for developing the female identity and independency in Latin American society. Thematically, this novel has addressed the question of tradition, values, societal issues, gender roles, identity and culture.

Laura Esquivel's novel, *Like Water for Chocolate*, a novel in monthly installment with recipes and home remedies and imaginative which had been a tremendous international best-selling book. The novel, *Like Water for Chocolate*, a hugely romantic, funny, sensual food, sex, and touched with moments of magic are wondrously inter woven. It relates the bizarre history of the all female De La Garze family. This novel, takes place during the revolution in early Twentieth Century Mexico, shows the important part of house and characterizes it as a source of knowledge and understanding that brings pleasure. Through the kitchen Esquivel tries to expose female rebellious nature towards the system of society. That is, this novel is

especially about the portrayal of female protagonist: Tita, who excavates the politics behind the institutionalization of the rules of masculine authority which is very oppressive towards females. As the resistance she violates the social conventions through the act of having love relation with Pedro, making illicit physical relationship with him, keeping strong desire to marry him, ruining the food in kitchen, disobeying her mother's orders, and so forth which are prohibited for females in the society. Such kind of decisions shows her free will and proves her as a strong and determined personality. In this way, she shows her rebellious attitude over continuous domination of females in traditional society that is based on hierarchy. So, this research mainly focuses to subvert the family tradition in Mexico.

In male dominated society, gender division has been deeply rooted throughout the history examining biological, psychological, historical, and cultural exploitations for the reduction of women to secondary sex. Moreover, she intends to establish equal treatment between male and female. In this way, she transforms herself from the submissive position to that of subversive one by embracing the radical thoughts and actions, her desire to change the existing social norms and values, rules and regulations as well.

Most of the major events of the novel centre around Tita, a dominant and bold character who does not sacrifice her own will in front of family tradition. So, Tita accomplishes all the activities which are indigestible in her family tradition. Tita does not care the criticism of the people in the society when she steps forward for the liberation. She does not like the conventional one-sided view which lacks right judgments in the society of Latin America. Because of her strong determination, she is ultimately able to transgress or cross over the tyrannical rules get by her mother.

Her confidence moves her towards strong resistance to destroy the biased rules and regulations of the community.

Latin America was not quite developed country and the people were following the unscientific blind faith and believed in family tradition. In Latin American countries males are taken as superior they are centre and everything is mobilized by the male and female are subjugated. Female are limited within the household activities and taken only as a matter of entertainment. They are kept within the boundary of family tradition. Women in Latin America are always been the victim of tradition constructed by male. So the condition of women is very pathetic and miserable. But some of the women, who have the power in the family, by wearing the mask of patriarchal ideology, try to manipulate the other family members. They follow the family tradition and compelled to adopt it to other family members.

In the novel, Mama Elena, an antagonist, attempts to follow the family tradition by internalizing the patriarchal ethos and dominates her youngest daughter. Tita, a protagonist in the novel, not only Tita but other members of family like Chenchu, Gertrudis, Nacha and Esperanza are also tried to impose by Mama Elena. But they revolt to go beyond such situation.

The novel is about the Mexican family tradition. According to the Mexican family tradition the youngest daughter of the house is restricted to love, marry and bear children but she must devote her life to caring for her mother until she dies. She should be limited within the domestic sphere. Here, Mama Elena, as a conventional woman does not want to change and loves to remain in status-quo by accepting traditional norms and values and tries to impose such norms in the family because her mind is just hypnotized by male ideology. Tita, the youngest daughter of the house, is enforced to adopt the family tradition by her patriarchal ideology - guided mother,

Mama Elena. She has been forbidden to love and marry condemned by Mexican tradition to look after her mother until she dies. She has been given lots of physical and mental torture without any reason she is limited within the kitchen. But Tita disobeying her mother seeming as rebellious character goes against the family tradition and fall in love with Pedro and desires to marry. Mama Elena, knowing the illegal relationship between Tita and Pedro, give mental and physical punishment and compelled Tita to do hard labor in the kitchen. She exposes her rebellious nature towards the system of the society. She also transmits her passion for Pedro through cooking. When Pedro comes to beg the hand of Tita, Mama Elena, denies this purpose but agrees to give the hand of Rosaura, the older daughter of the house. Although his marriage to Rosaura, Tita continuously determines to be in love with him. In the especial occasion of weeding party of Pedro and Rosaura, afflicted by Sadness, Tita pours her emotions into the food she prepares by means of her tears. Tita's tears induce incessant vomiting and a terrible sense of loss among the wedding guests- she subconsciously transforms the emotional violence into an act of social violence. The vomiting of Weeding guests was the disagreement or reaction with the unpleasant family tradition. After the sudden death of Rosaura, Tita is able to enjoy and relax with Pedro by challenging the traditional norms and standards.

Another female character, Gretrudis, Tita's oldest sister, as a rebellious character, runs away from home and involves in brothel as well which is not allowed by family tradition she also actively participants in the political revolution aiming to change the social norms and values. She intends to abolish the tyrannical family tradition and desire to establish freedom in the society.

Even after the death of Mama Elena, hypnotizing by the male-made tradition, she comes as a ghost and threatens Tita to break the love affairs with Pedro and orders

to follow the family tradition but, at that time Tita directly rejects or stands up to the ghost and says "I know who I am! A person who has a perfect right to live her life as she pleases. Once and for all, leave me alone, I won't put up with you! I hate you, I have always hated you!" (180). From this line, we know that Tita wants freedom and independency. The dialogue "I hate you, I have always hated you!" is not the hating of her mother but the hating of the family traditions. Then after the hating spirit of Mama Elena disappear forever. The disappearing of the hunting spirits of Mama Elena symbolizes the banishment of the family tradition. Tita feels changes in her life. She feels relief from the unpleasant social disorder.

Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate* has received numerous criticisms from diverse angles and point of views. Critics have studied the text in respect to moral, socio-political, and cultural perspectives. In the patriarchal society, males are superior to females. Whatsoever man does like love, hatred, pity, sympathy and so on, is no other than patriarchal ideology or discourse that contains the system of social discrimination, domination and exploitation over women, and the male identity over female. In this context, Kristin Ibsen in his *In Recipes, Reading, and Revolution Post Boom Parody in Like Water for Chocolate* states:

The use of traditional resources has the potentials to become revolutionary when recognized from the vantage point of women or only other marginalized group. The fact that Esquivel has chosen discourses not just outside the cannon but specifically associated with women's values and experiences allows her set forth an alternative to the hegemonic standard, based upon the real women's lives. The dominant discourse has focused upon the patriarchal domination of

family, favoring the construction of male identity over female identity. (117)

The given extract expressed by Ibsen shows the patriarchal domination in the family by using female and creates hegemonic standard of male as well as constructs the male identity over female identity. It is the masculine gaze and action where women are tactically involved in the suppression of women themselves. It means women and other marginalized group of the society are used as a tool in any kinds of revolution and they are oppressed, suppressed and dominated tactically by male and construct the male superiority in the society. Males cleverly create revolution between and females and females in the family and society and then they gain the profit of fighting between. They intend to destroy the unity of female in the family or society by making a certain rule and regulations and want maintain their hegemonic standard. It is the male's tendency to dominate the female.

In the novel, *Like Water for Chocolate* Mama Elena and her daughter, Tita, are fighting in the name of tradition. Tita is a central character of the novel has been dominated by her mother, Mama Elena. By internalizing the patriarchal ethos, she gives lots of mental physical and mental tortures in the life of Tita. Mama Elena, head of family, has certain power as male and intends to hegemonies in the family but Tita, a rebellious character, goes against of her tyrannical and cruel mother's will. The power structure is represented by Mama Elena, a woman who seems more male than female and whose sense of tradition relegates Tita to the life of subjugation, from which and through she ultimately finds liberation. The patriarchal structure circumscribe women to the seeming depriving them of voice, so Mama Elena places Tita in the kitchen but Tita empowered the undermined Mama Elena's authority not only by expressing herself through her food and poetic recipes but also by her

building of a mother-daughter like relationship with Nacha- the carrying on of the tradition which passes through kitchen and is transmitted from mother to daughter. Tita reveals against her mother's wishes. Here, Tita's rebelliousness and anger is not really towards her mother's desires, but it is against of the patriarchal attitude over female.

Likewise, Gertrudis, Tita's older sister and Mama Elena's illegitimate daughter who ran away with a soldier has also a vital role to change the family tradition. Not only can Gertrudis be considered the Moral centre of the novel, she was also the sexually liberated and active participant of the revolution. One critic, Zamudio-Taylor states about Gertrudis "her combined Male bravado and female sexuality provide a humorous upending of the masculinist and patriarchal ideal of Mexican Revolution as it has been depicted in literature" (50).

Through the above lines, we declare that it is a female activeness to establish the freedom as male in the society. The above lines show the Gertrudis's liberal mentality. Her desires of making upside-down of the masculinist and patriarchal ideology with the active participation in the Mexican revolution clarifies that she wants to change the patriarchal attitude over female. She wants to subvert the family tradition. Going against of the cultural tradition, she runs away from home and involved in brothel as prostitute without any negation. So, Gertrudis's leaving of home and involvement in the sexual is the great satire and challenge towards the family tradition which is anti-favor of the women. While a seemingly progressive female representation, one that can be interpreted more as a modern ideal of female identity. The female's liberal mentality shows the desire of independency and resist of patriarchy.

The novel also focuses on the preparation of Mexican tradition food. Women by Mexican, by birth are limited within the kitchen. It is the male -constructed norms and values. Women are not allowed to go out of social boundary.

Moreover, Margarita Jankauskait in her review "Food, Gender and representation" says "For, without a doubt, the relationship of Latin American women with food proves subversive to the domination power structure, not only in its ability to create a voice for the diminished female, but also in its tendency towards community food, by nature "Signifies interaction, mutual bond and community" (73)

The extract says that the relationship between Latin American women and kitchen plays the vital role to subvert the male domination. They use the kitchen as a tool of women reaction or female resist in the patriarchal society. It is the only way of women to fight against of male's hegemonic tendency. Traditionally, women are kept in the periphery of kitchen. It is a masculine action that intends to keep women under the control of male.

Mama Elena, a blind supporter of patriarchal norms and values, limits Tita in the kitchen but Tita crates the feminine power from the preparation of food in the creation of community, individual expression and culture. She tries to express her anger towards family tradition through the preparation of food. Preparation of recipes in the especial occasion of the marriage ceremony between Pedro and Rosaura by Tita, intentionally ruins the cake and everybody, who has been participated and have it, they vomit. The vomiting of everybody is the harsh disagreement of the family tradition and Tita's resist of the patriarchal norms and values. So, there is a food itself that Tita creates as a head cook on the family ranch, food so vibrant and sensual, so imposed with her feeling of longing, frustration, rebellion or love that it effects

everyone who takes it. The surviving, silenced female character employs the recipe to liberate herself from her male oppressors.

Through the novel, *Like Water for Chocolate*, Esquivel offers a liberating vision of denigrated experiences of daily activities in many women's lives. The novel, although repressive societal tradition appears to dominate Tita's life, the specific manner of preparing a recipe actually determines the lives and destinies of the characters. The food in the novel used as metaphor indirectly refers to the subversive goals of women. The domesticity of Mexican women as symbolized by the kitchen in Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate* is a vehicle for creativity and collective experiences share with other women of different classes that promote female solidarity which helps to revolt against the cultural tradition.

Leah A. Cheyne states, "liberation is illusory ideal in a society and identity built on tradition and memory but, like female characters in the novel it is one worth striving for" (7). The tradition of Mexico is very unpleasant and disorder that has overwhelmed the household. Liberation and independency of female is very difficult and there is harsh discrimination and injustice in the society. Women are limited within the certain rules and regulations. Although the strict rules upon females, female characters of the novel, revolt against the dominant role of the family tradition. They challenge the traditional boundaries.

The female character like Tita, Gertudis, Nacha, Chenchu is embody one of the conflicting ideologies that inform the struggle of the Mexican revolution. Tita closely associated with the Mestizo culture though her close bond to Nacha, the head cook, and food, is the oppressed, fighting with the domestic sphere for rights denied to her. Nacha, a head cook of Mama Elena's family, very low economic status in the society appears, as a spiritual guide to encourage and support in every steps of Tita's

life even after her death. Gertrudis, the middle and illegitimate daughter of Mama Elena, actively participate in the Mexican revolution to upending of the Musculinists and patriarchal ideology in the Mexican society. Likewise Chancha, another important female character plays the vital role to break the conventional thinking with the active involvement in the kitchen to help in every activities of Tita after Nacha's death.

Wendy Perkins reviews the novel *Like Water for Chocolate* from raising the issue of magic realism and explores how Esquivel's use of magic realism in *Like Water for Chocolate* reinforces the novel's celebration and condemnation of domesticity. In this context, he asserts:

Esquivel employment of magic realism with it mingling of the fantastic and real provides an apt vehicle for the exploration of the forces of rebellion, submission, and retribution and of the domestic sphere that can both limit and encourage self-expression. [. . .] In *Like Water for Chocolate*, magic realism has become an appropriate vehicle for the express of the paradoxical nature of the kitchen as a domestic space. This novel reveals how the kitchen can become a nurturing and creative domain, providing sustenance sand pleasure for others; a site for repression, where one can be confined exclusively to domestic tasks and lose or be denied sense of self; and a site for rebellion against traditional boundaries. (2-3)

The above statement clarifies that the main intention to use magic realism in the novel is to subvert the male domination and orders in the society. To show the reality of society, it is submitted in the form of romantic or fantastic way which helps to dissect the hierarchy between males and females. In Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate* incorporates magic realism to depict a realistic American mentality and

creates an autonomous style of literature in Latin America. Esquivel's use of magic realism in *Like Water for Chocolate* has provided a sharp weapon to rebel against the domestic sphere and fight against the patriarchy. The magic events have been presented within female context: all of the magical characteristics have to do with women and women's ghosts and spirits. Here, Tita even a virgin girl nursing or milking to Roberto, shows the power of females to challenge the patriarchal socio-cultural structure. Moreover, Tita's cooking has the power to ignite lust, happiness, and excessive amount of emotions in her guests.

The research focuses female suffering and their struggle for existence in the text is a consequence of cultural tradition cultivated by patriarchy. It hypothesises the female resist to gain liberation, freedom and independency from the harsh disorder and discriminated society. They also want to develop their female identity in the society. This research not only shows the love affairs but critically examines the female's role to change in traditional attitude towards authority and freedom of expression. The novel like water for chocolate deals with the shift from a traditional to a modern society and women's liberation from the oppressive judgment of the society. The female characters like Tita, Nacha, Chanda and Gerdrigus are oppressed sexually, politically, economically and socio-culturally and mentally exploited. Mama Elena, a Manish natured - women beats her moreover she has been broken the virginity by Pedro. The women named Chancha, who has been exploited sexually. She has been raped by a group of bandits and she does not get justice. She is oppressed economically. Because of the poverty, she is compelled to stay as a cook in the house of Mama Elena. Likewise, Nacha has a same condition like Chancha. She works at Mama Elena's house as a worker to exist her life. So, all above female characters are suffered/exploited a lots because of the socio-political and cultural

structure which is against the female wishes and desires. Because of the great suffering all these female characters in the novel, go against the male domination, socio-political structure and family tradition in Mexico for existence. This research focuses on feminist rebellion through Tita and so on patriarchal society of Mexico. Observing the condition of females in Latin America after feminist revolution in 1960s and radical feminist movement, they have emphasized the patriarchal roots of inequality between men and women, more especially, social domination of women by men. Radical feminism is only the suitable literary theory to study Esquivel's *like water for chocolate*. Therefore, the main concern of this project is to study the novel through radical feminism.

Esquivel, the Latin American novelist in the period of feminist revolution, explores the extreme male domination over females in Mexican society. To analysis the domination and exploitation of the female characters and their revolt, radical feminist is needed. So, as to study Esquivel's novel, *Like Water for Chocolate* incorporates the rebellious deeds of Tita, Gretrudes, Nacha, and other female characters.

Radical feminist theory helps us to analysis literary text from feminist uprising. It is a current theoretical perspective within feminism that emphasis on the theory of patriarchy as a system of power which organizes society into complex relationship based on hierarchy between male and female. It aims to challenge and overthrow patriarchy by opposing standard gender roles and oppression women and calls for a radical reordering of society. Further, radical feminism posits towards patriarchal subordination where women are view as the 'other'. They abolish this hierarchic system through revolution. They tend to be militant in their approach and oppose existing political and social organization which is inherently tied to patriarchy.

They are skeptical to political action within current system and instead support cultural changes. It is the celebration of the construction of individual identities in a complex postmodern world and invites women to define themselves as they wish from the smorgasbord of possibilities. Any literary text visualizes the reality of any particular society. The visualization of female revolt in the text is the impact of feminist revolt mainly in Latin America.

Due to the continuous exploitation upon women, feminist move to change their condition through revolution. In this condition, they fight for their rights and discard the life-long domination of females. Esquivel presents the resistance of female in the conventional patriarchal society through female characters that is caused by feminist revolution. So, to analysis the domination and resistance reflected in the novel, radical feminist has become the suitable literary theory.

Radical feminists, like Simone De Beauvior, Kate Millett, Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick Valerie Bryson, whose views are taken as a primary tool of research analysis, seek to abolish patriarchy and freedom as men in the society. In the novel, *Like Water for Chocolate*, all the female characters seek freedom, equality and independency in the society. Other many feminist critics like Susan Bordo, Debra Castillo and so on views also has been included to support the research argument whose criticisms helps to evoke a new set of meaning structure against traditional norms and standards and their views helps to subvert the patriarchal or traditional discourse.

The primary objective of this study is to point out the domination of females and question against it in the conventional society of Mexico and quest of freedom. This research aims to reveal the reality of the tradition which always marginalizes women. But women reject such kind of tradition and move radically unlike social

concept. Moreover, this study explores different issues such as political, economical, and social phenomenon of Latin America. Esquivel, in her novel, *Like Water for Chocolate*, incorporates the marginalization, domination, exploitation of females in the society by applying the tradition which is conceptualized by patriarchy and their revolt against it. Inserting various radical activities of Tita and other female characters like Tita's love expression toward Pedro, ruining the food, disobey her mother's order, having physical relation with Pedro and keeping strong desire of marriage with him. Likewise, Gretrudes's abandonment of house and joining in brothel at Mexico-Texas border, and involving in the revolutionary army, Esperanza's marriage with Alex which breaks the De La Garza family tradition. So, from the above points, Esquivel, in this novel, is trying to expose the revolution of female in Mexico.

This study is divided into three different chapters: the first chapter involves general introduction including domination, power, and revolt. In the same way, the second chapter is the methodology along with textual analysis which provides the theoretical modality of radical feminism that explores the subversion of tradition in Mexican society. The final chapter concludes the entire study with the revolution of radical thoughts and actions of female characters that resist the patriarchy.

## **II. Resistance and Subversion of Patriarchy in *Like Water for Chocolate***

This chapter examines the Esquivel's novel, *Like Water for Chocolate* from the perspective of feminism, especially from radical feminism. The novel focuses on mostly female characters. Esquivel points to a more radical definition of feminism in this novel. The story focuses on mostly female characters that assume the gender roles typically associated with men. Esquivel presents these strong female figures question any preconceptions previously held about the capabilities of women. Feminism has been a concept long thought about. Generally, dealing with the idea that men have historically been thought of as superior to women, the feminist philosophy contends that men and women are equal and thus deserve equal treatment. Esquivel makes it clear that all the women characters are not dependent in any way to any men. This independence of men that she creates is a key to understanding the feminist nature of the novel.

The novel elucidates how the female character Tita tries to subvert age-old Mexican tradition. Mexican patriarchal rule demands that the youngest offspring take care of the parents at the old age. Set in Mexico at the turn of the 20th century, *Like Water for Chocolate*, centers on the plight of youngest daughter of the De la Garza family whose familial position destines her to remain at home, unmarried, and in charge of the life-long care of her tyrannical mother. The conflict arises when Tita falls in love and is denied both marriage and influence over her own affairs. Ultimately, Tita negotiates a voice through the elaborate, fantastical recipes she creates, thereby subverting gender suppression by speaking through the stereotypical women's sphere of cooking. These recipes and their fantastic results reflect and reinforce the suppression of the female voice and its inevitable note of resistance.

In *Like Water for Chocolate*, Laura Esquivel writes a tale of female repression due to cultural and familial pressure throughout the stereotypical women's sphere of cooking and romance. However, Esquivel's protagonist, Tita, is capable of "cooking up" more than delightful items. Tita's use of her feminine abilities in the kitchen is not without risk. From the very beginning of the novel when Mama Elena declares, "You have no opinion about anything that's the end of that!" (17), Tita is forced to subvert Mama Elena's authority by expressing herself through her recipes at the earlier parts of the novel. But at the end, she resists radically. Esquivel writes:

Tita, on the other hand, felt smothered by her overbearing mother. She wanted something more out of life than just taking care of her mother, she needed a different kind of love. Mama Elena and Tita truly loved one another but was not aware of the extent that they loved each other.

(54)

Thus, Mama Elena's control is not the end of Tita's opinions, but the beginning.

When the oppression crosses the limit, Tita is compelled to resist her mother.

The violence that Tita suffers at the hands of her mother shows male brutality. For example, Mama Elena appears to be made up of characteristics which are normally suitable to men rather than women. On the other hand, a closer reading of the novel shows that all of the female characters are stronger than their male counterparts. It is Tita, rather than Pedro, who finally dares to confront her mother and Rosura, while even before her rebellion, Tita holds a significant amount of power through the strange effects of her cooking.

As the youngest of three daughters born to the De la Garza family, Tita is the one chosen by familial tradition to remain unmarried in the life-long care of her mother. She is in fact, by her position of birth, an unwilling victim of a harsh and

insensitive tradition. Whenever Mama Elena reminds Tita of the tradition, she becomes sad. Esquivel writes: "Mama Elena threw her a look that seemed to Tita to contain all the years of repression that had flowed over the family . . . 'You know perfectly well that being the youngest daughter means you have to take care of me until the day I die'" (14). However, in the story as there is only the mother living not the father, the mother is the one who exercises or follows the tradition. So, when Tita attempts to reason with her mother, "a very angry Mama Elena left the kitchen, and for the next week she didn't speak a single word to her" (9). In this sense, the mother becomes the symbol of patriarchy. But from the very beginning, Tita makes an attempt to resist the tradition. She knows that the discussion is not one of the forms of communication permitted in the household, but even so, for the first time in her life, she "intend[s] to protest her mother's ruling" as she counter her mother saying, "but in my opinion . . ." (14). However the mother interrupts saying: "You don't have an opinion, and that's all I want to hear about it. For generations, not a single person in my family has ever questioned this tradition, and no daughter of mine is going to be the one to start" (14). This shows that Tita possesses revolutionary nature, who wants to break away from unfair tradition.

One of the radical feminists, Christine Delphy claims that marriage is a "labour contract through which men exploit women's labour and become their economic masters" (qtd. in Valerie 177) and that, because most women perform this unpaid labour, the position of all women is depressed. Ironically, Mama Elena, as a female, marries her daughter, Tita and exploits her domestic affairs. Elena treats Tita as an abusive husband. Her strong rejection of Tita's love for Pedro reinforces Elena's male chauvinistic nature. So, patriarchy is based primarily upon male violence and control of women's sexuality; here it should be noted that, for some feminists, high

levels of domestic violence and the sexual abuse of both women and children within the home and the family as the means of patriarchal oppression where many women face male power in its crudest and most aggressive form. From this perspective, individual acts of abuse are linked to wider patterns of power, so that it is unsurprising that authorities have been reluctant to interfere in 'private' domestic affairs or to provide adequate support for women trying to escape domestic violence.

Mama Elena is a harsh, cruel woman who does not fall under the category of the traditional view of mothers. Instead, Mama Elena is portrayed as an evil mother - an authoritarian, tyrannical, twisted woman, who takes delight in using her power to destroy her daughters' life - while also being "merciless, killing with a single blow" (47). Mama Elena rules her household with an iron fist, and a dominating power that is often cruel, even heartless. As such, "when it came to dividing, dismantling, dismembering, desolating, detaching, dispossessing, destroying, or dominating, Mama Elena was a pro" (87). The way in which Mama Elena controls and dominates her children can also be seen in the way in which they jump to obey her every command. For example, on hearing the words, "That's it for today" (13), the children "all sprang into action" (13), each one of them fulfilling a list of chores before going to their bedrooms to "read, say their prayers, and go to sleep" (13). In addition, their work had to be perfect, and there room for discussion or debate - young women, in the eyes of Mama Elena, did not have any circumstances that the daughters went against her wishes. If they did, then she disowned them. Once she hit Tita, " Mama Elena went to her, picked up a wooden spoon and smashed her across the face with it" (89). This reflects the abusive husband's physical violence on the wife.

Besides her tyrannical behavior, Mama Elena is also a cruel, heartless woman. After having forbidden Tita's marriage, for example, she suggests that Pedro should

marry Rosaura, thus treating marriage as if it is a business arrangement rather than an act of commitment between two people who love each other. However, her cruelty is further demonstrated by her forcing Tita to cook the food for the wedding. "I won't have disobedience," she tells the heartbroken young girl, "not am I going to let you ruin your sister's wedding, with you acting like a victim. You're in charge of all the preparations starting now, and don't ever let me catch you with a single tear on your long face, do you hear?" (28). It would seem that although intent on destroying others, for Tita Mama Elena "had made an exception; she had been killing her off a little at a time since she was a child" (47). However, Tita's inability to marry the man she loves due to rules that are predominantly male meant that she " . . . couldn't resist the temptation to violate the oh-so-rigid rules her mother imposed in the kitchen ... and in life" (179).

As Maite Zubiaurre suggests that because she [Tita] is "unable overtly to contravene her mother's tyrannical caprices, Tita nevertheless finds in her prodigious talent as a cook an implacable instrument of rebellion and empowerment" (32). Through her skills and talents in the kitchen, Tita effectively subverts Mama Elena's dictates. Brinda Mehta notes that "female power in the kitchen lies in its invisibility, that is, in its ability to transform an unfavorable situation to the advantage of women through their strategies of 'subservice' affirmation that guarantees the inclusiveness of a variety of experiences" (161). Thus, Tita experiences the passion of her obsession for Pedro through the results of her cooking as it is fostered on those who partake of her passion-infused recipes. The background setting of the Mexican Revolution makes these stories of female individualism all the more plausible in light of the expanded role of Mexican women during the Revolution. Santiago Ramirez describes the role of women during this time as one of unprecedented equality:

During the 1920 Revolution, Mexican men thus became united in new relationships to Mexican women. For the first time in Mexican history, women developed their potentialities on a large scale beside the men and won recognition as companions, mates, and partners. (qtd. in Billings 62)

Tita's elder sister, the first-born Gertrudis also escapes her prescribed role to marry and expand the family's empire, as a result of one of Tita's recipes. The flame of revolution is ignited in Gertrudis who escapes the family ranch with a rebel soldier, works in a border-town brothel, and eventually returns to the ranch as a "general in the revolutionary army" (163). Here, we witness the creation of a second strong female character. When we first see Gertrudis we see just another female character. By placing this normally male role in a woman Esquivel questions the typical role of the woman in a home of just raising children by giving additional responsibilities.

But it is Mama Elena, the tyrannical, widow of the De La Garza clan who is most responsible for the maintenance of the patriarchal structure and the imposition of order. Upon the death of her husband from a heart attack when Tita is only two-days-old, Mama Elena quickly sheds her role as mother and becomes the head of the ranch - the symbolic male. "Mama Elena's milk dried up" (10) shows that she is transforming into an oppressive male, whom the daughters revolt.

According to the radical feminists like de Beauvoir, female biology cannot be a positive cause for celebration, and she denied that it could be a source of superior qualities or understandings: "One should not believe that the female body gives one a new view of the world. That would be ridiculous and absurd. That would mean turning it into a counter-penis. (qtd. in Bryson 133). It is this very refusal to recognize

any essential female identity for Elena that she acts as an oppressive patriarchy towards Tita.

Mama Elena easily takes the position of patriarchal figure as she imposes harsher rules upon her daughters. Therefore, she can obviously be described the authoritarian head of a patriarch structure than to the stereotypical nurturing role of mother. She behaves as if she is a male figure and treats her daughters accordingly. She does not want her daughters to address her as 'Mama' as it would sound feminine. She desires to be addressed differently as *Mami*. Esquivel remarks, "Mama Elena felt that the word Mama had a disrespectful sound to it, and so from the time they were little, she had ordered her daughters to use the word 'mommy' when speaking to her" (15). This shows that not only does Mama Elena reject the role of mother, she rejects the title as well.

Mama Elena's suppression of Tita basically takes place in keeping with her accepted patriarchal role. As Toril Moi argues in *The Feminist Reader* (1989), "patriarchal oppression consists of imposing certain social standards of femininity on all biological women" (123), and ironically, it is this patriarchal oppression which Mama Elena enforces on her daughter. Tita is brought up in the domestic activities of homemaking, sewing, and cooking—all standards of femininity—even though she would never be the matriarch of her own home. Elena makes her daughter do everything in the house perfectly and appropriately. She always addresses Tita "in an authoritarian voice" (29). When Mama Elena discovers that Tita has sewn perfect stitches, but without first putting in the basting stitch, she tells her to redo the work, "then go rip it out. Baste it and sew it again and then come and show it to me. And remember that the lazy man and the stingy man end up walking their road twice" (15). As a rebellious character, Tita questions everything what her mother orders her to do.

So, Mama Elena asks her daughter, "Are you starting with your rebelliousness again? It's enough that you have the audacity to break the rules in your sewing" (15). Here, Elena's use of the word "again" shows that Tita is always a rebellious person as she does not blindly or submissively follow what her mother says.

Many radical feminists have agreed that, contrary to the assumptions of conventional political theory, the family is indeed central part of society's power structure; as such it both sustains patriarchal power in the 'public' world and is itself a source of women's oppression. Far from being a 'natural' arrangement or individual choice based on mutual love and respect in which the emotional, sexual and domestic needs of adult partners are met and their children cared for, it is a social institution in which women's labour is exploited. As Valerie Bryson writes:

Men exploit women's labour and become their economic masters and that, because most women perform this unpaid labour, the position of all women in the employment market is depressed and marriage continues to appear their most viable economic option. This domestic exploitation takes place outside the capitalist mode of production, and she therefore argued that a genuinely materialist analysis of women's oppression shows that this is not simply derived from class struggle and capitalism, but that it has an independent material basis in women's unpaid domestic labour. (176)

So, in the case of Tita, her family structure exploits her. According to Kate Millett, "Patriarchy's chief institution is the family" (175). In their family, the exploiter is the mother, the symbol of patriarchy as she exercises the full power after the death of her husband. The daughter's exploitation can be observed from the preparation of Mama Elena's bath:

Preparing Mama Elena's bath was quite a ceremony. The water had to be heated with lavender flowers, Mama Elena's favourite scent. Then this 'decoration' had to be strained through a clean cloth and a few drops of aguardienten brandy added to it. Finally, she [Tita] had to carry buckets of hot water, one after another, to 'the dark room' . . .

(84)

With the insights provided by the concept of patriarchy, it can be argued that men benefited from present arrangements both in terms of domestic comfort and through disadvantaging women who attempted to compete with them in politics and paid employment. Mama Elena is the master and the Tita is worker, exploited.

Unluckily, clever Mama Elena senses something between Pedro and Tita, and thus she decides to send Rosaura, Pedro, and baby Roberto to San Antonio under the excuse of looking for healthier medical attention for Rosaura. In the wake of their departure, Tita becomes hopeless and pays no attention to her duties in the household. At the meantime, federal troops attack the ranch, but the situation gets bad to worse when the word arrives from San Antonio that Roberto has passed away, since "whatever he ate, it didn't agree with him and so, he died" (99) After hearing this news, Tita lashes out at Mama Elena, screaming that Mama Elena is to be held responsible for the baby's death. Tita's confrontation with her mother marks the first time that Tita is able to state her viewpoints, and her misery at learning of Roberto's death inspires Tita to confront Mama Elena's unkindness, and she manages hesitantly to create the control of her voice. As of result, Mama Elena instructs Tita to be sent to an asylum, and Dr. John Brown rescues her from the ranch and takes her away. Auspiciously, under the loving care of Dr. Brown, Tita little by little comes out from her disturbed inner shell. This is for the first time Tita is removed from the domestic

world of the kitchen and the ranch; and at Dr. Brown's house, she is able to discover a new way of presenting in the world, not restricted by the limits forced by Mama Elena. Although throughout her stay at John's house, Tita remains unspoken; yet a some kind of link develops between her and John as they spend a huge amount of time together. John also takes the privilege to share with Tita about recipe for making matches, and with this recipe, he clarifies the theory that an inner fire burns in each person and describes the ways in which one must protect this fire. This theory allows Tita to realize that "she knew what set off her explosions, but each time she had try to light a match, it had steadily been blown out" (116) Thus, this inner fire has become the innermost figure of the novel, one that passes through, and comes to represent Tita's ongoing journey toward selfhood, individuality and liberation.

When Mama Elena forbids Tita's marriage to Pedro who instead marries her elder sister, Rosaura, Tita is obliged to prepare the wedding banquet, "not that she made any complaints—under her mother's watchful eye she didn't dare—but when Mama Elena left the kitchen to go to bed, Tita let out a long sigh" (30). Tita's femininity is nurtured even as her femaleness or nature is suppressed at the hands of her mother. Under the strong inflexible influence of her mother, Tita's need to speak is suppressed. Nevertheless, in many respects, Tita can only express herself or her individuality through the fantastic results of her cooking recipes. This reflects her resistance which is on one level productive because it allows her to express her freedom or voice.

After the wedding of Pedro and Rosaura takes place, which would also mark the first example when Tita pours her emotions into the food she prepares. This results into the nonstop sickness and a terrible sense of loss among the wedding guests, which has been ultimately transformed from an act of emotional aggression

that Tita has endured into an act of social aggression. In addition, it is Tita that ultimately "penetrates" Pedro through the sensual power of the dishes she produces in the kitchen: "It was as if a strange alchemical process had dissolved her entire being in the rose petal sauce, in the tender flesh of the quails, in the wine, and in each and every one of the meal's aromas. In this way, she penetrated Petro's body, hot, voluptuous, aromatic, totally sensuous" (49). In contrast, Pedro, and indeed the other male characters, are portrayed as being indecisive and weak, and prone to petty jealousies. Although, for example, Pedro claims to love Tita, he is not strong enough to challenge her mother's refusal to allow him to marry Tita, but instead accepts Rosaura as his bride. Furthermore, his weak nature is displayed in his refusal to consummate his marriage.

Despite the fact that Tita can only express her sexuality within the household sphere, Gertrudis is able to surpass these limitations without a second thought. Her disappearance can be seen as a success, in which she discards the ideas of social modesty in order follow her uncontrolled wishes. Tita expresses her sexuality by being closer to her lover Pedro. But Mama Elena always keeps her vigilant eye on Tita. "The eagle eye of Mama Elena" (73) is always fixed on Tita which troubles Tita deeply. Once whenever Mama Elena finds Tita near Pedro, she scolds her saying, "I told you many times not to go near Pedro, did you do it?" (158), Tita resists her mother implying that she cannot do that as she retorts, "I tried, Mami . . . but---" (158). Tita's reply reflects that the mother must not prevent her love and sexuality. At another occasion, when Mama Elena calls Tita and Pedro 'shameless' and challenges Tita to leave the house threatening with bloodshed--which the males frequently do--, Tita resists the mother boldly. She challenges: "The one who should be going is you. I'm tired of you tormenting me. Leave me in peace once and for all" (179). The

following dialogue between the mother and the daughter reflects the subversion of the patriarchal exploitation:

'Not until you behave like a good woman, or a decent one at least!'

What do you mean, decent? Like you?

'Yes'

'But that's just what I'm doing! Or didn't you have an illicit child?'

'You will be condemned to hell for talking to me like this!'

'No more than you!' (179)

Whenever the exploitation is beyond the limit, Tita confronts Mama Elena directly.

Tita rakes up every wrong that the mother committed in the past. Thus, Tita's resistance to her mother is the resistance to the oppressive which always tries to limit women's freedom.

Fortunately after this incident, a surprising happiness comes to Tita's life with the birth of her nephew Roberto, the son of Rosaura and Pedro. Tita eventually takes up the responsibility of nursing her nephew, but once she offers her breast to pacify the child, she finds out that she is miraculously full with milk and is able to nourish Roberto. Pedro then later discovers this secret, but he helps her to hide this secret from the rest of the family, by which means he tries to increase the illicit relationship between the two yet further. This connection also let into the communication between Tita and Pedro, where she let him observe her breast, "Pedro's eyes beheld a sight he had only glimpsed before through her clothing: Tita's breast" (71). This is an attraction in their erotic relationship and is expressed like having Tita being transformed from chaste to experience without the advantage of any physical contact; and with the fact that Tita has been able to produces milk as though she had been pregnant.

First the female quality to give birth and produce milk is their power which men lack Margrit Shildrick and Janet Price write:

The uniquely female capacity to give birth 'naturally' has been taken up as the center of women's power, simultaneously to be jealously guarded against the incursions of biotechnology, and celebrated in its own right. In the case of both sexuality and reproduction, the body retains something of its uncomfortable status as a place of ambush, of its vulnerability to male power, and yet it grounds an affirmation of the feminine. . . (4)

The novelist emphasizes on the feminine quality of Tita as she writes, "Was it possible that she was feeding the baby? She removed the boy from her breast: a thin stream of milk short of supernatural act, unheard of in these times" (70). Tita's capacity to produce milk is a search for femininity and motherhood, which her mother has always tried to disown. So her capacity to produce milk without being pregnant is an act of resistance to her mother, who acts like a male figure, whose milk "dried up" which reflects the power of motherhood.

Debra Castillo in the Preface to her collection, *Talking Back* (1992), suggests that "recipe sharing has a sinister as well as a celebratory side. The recipe serves as an index of female creative power" (xiv). Thus Tita's cooking becomes for her not only a method to communicate her inner needs within the repressive familial order which surrounds her, but also serves to reinforce her individual identity as woman. Otherwise, Tita remains just a housemaid. In her work on Indo-Trinidadian fiction and cooking, Brinda Mehta argues that "food, as a symbol of communal identification, serves as an indicator of the sexual division of labor that maintains the 'dynamics of the food politic' within a society... [and] promotes hierarchical

organization of gender relations within the home” (164). Thus, Tita’s assignment to cooking duties defines both her role and her position in the family. Both the plot and subplots are woven together to reinforce and show the central theme of gender suppression and the resulting power of subversion.

Tita’s only weapon against this repression is her fantastical recipes, believed by Nacha to have been bestowed upon her by the Gods through an infant diet of “corn gruel and teas” (13). Tita’s culinary speech not only expresses her love and desire, but also her lust and her need for revenge.

Her skill in cooking helps her find a way to create change within the system of the family. Her cooking is magical and has an effect on the people who eat her food. Somehow, this is a commentary on how domestic chores in the house can affect the household in a significant way, creating a magical liminal space within the confines of the kitchen. In the same way, her inner strength and creativity make her victorious over Mama Elena and Rosaura, and, as Esquivel mentioned in her interview that Tita makes her own revolution in the family environment. She does not emerge solely as a romantic figure, but also as a woman who cares deeply for her family and everyone’s welfare. She is able to find her own power in the kitchen, and then in the whole family, despite the patriarchal structures that have ruled it for so long.

On the other hand, the aspect of Tita’s recipes is as inescapable as is her passion for Pedro, her lost lover. Her tears of longing is revealed through the cake she prepared for Rosaura’s and Pedro’s wedding: “the moment they took their first bite of the cake, everyone was flooded with a great wave of longing” (42). The fantastic results of her culinary achievement not only reflect her longing for Pedro, but also her revenge toward Pedro’s bride, her sister, Rosaura:

But the weeping was just the first symptom of a strange intoxication—an acute attack of pain and frustration—that seized the guests and scattered them across the patio and the grounds and in the bathrooms, all of them wailing over lost love. Everyone there, every last person fell under this spell, and not very many of them made it to the bathrooms in time—those who didn't join the collective vomiting that was going on all over the patio. (39)

Tita, the only person unaffected, garnered her ultimate revenge when Rosaura, her wedding dress defiled by vomit, is confronted by Pedro, who “proposes they leave the consummation of the nuptials for another night” (40). Rosaura and her wedding guests are not the only victims of Tita's bold power. In a sad irony, Macha, Tita's surrogate mother, is found dead, “her eyes wide open, medicinal leaves upon her temples, a picture of her fiancé clutched in her hands” (47). Although Tita is able to speak through her recipes, the power that she unleashes is beyond her control.

Instead of ending their relationship upon the wedding of Pedro and Rosaura, Tita and Pedro continue their secret love affair of stolen caresses out of the sight of the condemning eyes of Mama Elena and the trusting eyes of Rosaura. Thus, she defies the ruling of her mother that she remain chaste. Each recipe from Tita's imagination becomes an expression of her unfulfilled passion; the resulting fantastic outcome not limited to her conscious longing, but to the deeper expression of her subconscious mind.

Tita's recipe for March, “quail in rose petal sauce” (49), is made from the petals of a bouquet of roses whose thorns pricked Tita's fingers, causing her blood to taint the petals. This recipe, ingested by Gertrudis, turns Gertrudis into the medium

through which a sexual liaison between Tita and Pedro is consummated: “with that meal it seemed they had discovered a new system of communication in which Tita was the transmitter, Pedro the receiver, and poor Gertrudis the medium, the conducting body through which the singular sexual message was passed” (53).

However pleasurable this experience is for Tita and Pedro, it results in the albeit welcomed abduction of Gertrudis by a soldier of the Revolution, her introduction to prostitution, and her banishment from the family until after her mother’s death.

Gertrudis is a strong character in the novel. She is first caught by her strong desires, fuelled by a dish cooked by Tita, and becomes a prostitute in order to quench them. She then joins the rebel army of Pancho Villa, and by virtue of her heroism and courage, goes up the ranks to become a general. She is a character fuelled by her strength and her desire, which could easily be misrepresented and condemned as selfishness and lust. Esquivel has shown that Gertrudis represents the first stage of feminism, breaking away, total sexual liberation, in fact a masculinization as she goes out and becomes a part of the revolution.

It is largely Tita’s passion which acts upon the recipes to produce their fantastic results. Even though Tita is able to act as a wet nurse to Rosaura and Pedro’s first child, Roberto, her recipe for hot chocolate, intended to help Rosaura produce sufficient breast milk, does nothing to enable Rosaura to nurse her own child, eventually resulting in the child’s death after Pedro and Rosaura relocate to San Antonio, forced there by Mama Elena’s attempt to separate Tita from Pedro.

In *Like Water for Chocolate*, the kitchen, according to Jaffe, is symbolic of “confinement and escape” (224). Tita is angry that she is being confined in the domestic sphere, as the daughter who is tasked to take care of her mother until death, and yet, her skill and inventiveness in cooking empowers her and, to a certain extent,

is a way to escape her mother's domineering clutches. Hence, according to Jaffe, "Under Tita's dominion, then, the kitchen evolves as a space not only of domestic activity but of feminist rebellion" (225).

None of Tita's recipes has the power to produce fantastic results except those where passion is the motivation. When Tita learns that Rosaura's second child, a daughter ironically named Esperanza meaning hope, is destined to remain her own mother's caretaker fulfilling the same role as Tita, her fury is unrestrained:

If only Rosaura had burned her mouth to a crisp! And had never let those words leak out, those foul, filthy, frightful, repulsive, revolting, unreasonable words. Better to have swallowed them and kept them deep in her bowels until they were putrid and worm eaten. If only she [Tita] would live long enough to prevent her sister from carrying out such a dire intention. (131)

It is at this point, at the height of her anger that Tita is described as being literally, "like water for chocolate" (141) or at her emotional boiling point. Tita's boiling passion is two-fold. First she is consumed by her passionate love for Pedro and second by her condemnation of the family tradition which Rosaura seems intent upon fostering on her own daughter, Esperanza. Although it is her passion for Pedro which causes her to reject Dr. John Brown, an American doctor who has helped her understand her internal passion, it is her second passionate hatred of Rosaura's decision which is ultimately fulfilled by Tita's recipes—her wish for Rosaura to swallow her horrid and putrid words: "For some weeks now, she had been having serious digestive problems; she suffered from flatulence and bad breath. Rosaura felt so distressed by these upheavals that she had determined that she and Pedro should sleep in separate bedrooms" (158). Tita's wish-filled recipe not only results in her

sister's distress, but also in Tita's creative access to Pedro. Eventually, even though futile preparations continue for Tita's marriage to Dr. Brown, the tension between Rosaura and Tita continues to build until Rosaura confronts Tita with the growing evidence of her forbidden liaison with Pedro. Tita openly declares her love for Pedro and her disdain for Rosaura's continuation of the familiar tradition of near enslavement of the youngest daughter, in this case, her beloved niece, Esperanza. Their argument ends with another of Tita's wishes:

Esperanza was one of the things Tita loved most in the world. The anguish she felt! As she tore apart the last little piece of tortilla left in her hand, she wished with all her heart that her sister would be swallowed up by the earth. That was the least she deserved! (194)

Tita's love for her nephew reflects her search for motherhood as she has been prevented by her mother from feminine attributes. To prevent Tita from marrying is against the natural law of human civilization and sociology. However, Tita resists her mother's decree by developing relationship with Pedro.

If we study Foucault's power relationship, we get enough insight in order to understand and interpret feminism as body politics. As Foucault holds that power operators through multiple networks, prevailing forms of selfhood and subjectivity are maintained, not through physical restraint and coercion, but through individual self-surveillance and self-correction to the norm. Bordo quotes Foucault:

There is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorizing to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against himself. (253)

Though power is not seemingly held by anyone, it is, in fact, held by some in disguise. This helped promote male dominance and female subordination, so much of which, in a modern western context, is reproduced voluntarily, through self-normalization to everyday habits of masculinity and femininity. Here Foucault's ideas are central in self-normalization of daily habits for women. Bordo gives examples of eating disorders as arising out of and reproducing non-native feminine practices of our culture. She further writes: "These are practices which train the female body in docility and obedience to cultural demands while at the same time being experienced in terms of 'power' and control" (253). Bordo is for subverting all this and for self-correcting to norms.

Foucault emphasized the fact that power relations are never seamless, but always generating new forms of culture and subjectivity, and new ways for potential resistance to emerge. He came to sex that where there is power, there is always resistance. So, if we take Foucault's insight, prevailing norms have transformative potential. Bordo sees resistant power liberating power in women's docile bodies. She writes:

While it is true that we may experience the illusion of 'power' while actually performing as 'docile bodies' ... it is also true that our very 'docility' can have consequences that are personally liberating and/or culturally transforming. So, for example, the woman who goes on a rigorous weight-training programme in order to achieve a currently stylish look may discover that her new muscles also enable her to assert herself more forcefully at work ... 'feminine' decorativeness may function 'subversively' in professional contexts which are dominated by highly masculinist norms. Modern power relations are

thus unstable; resistance is perpetual and hegemony precarious.

(254)

Esquivel's novel succeeds in expressing both the patriarch suppression of the female voice and interestingly the subsequent matriarchal support of that suppression when enhanced by uncontrolled, seemingly limitless power of the mother. Both Mama Elena and Tita are in a way victims of their own power. Mama Elena assumes the position of power upon the death of her husband, yet continues the patriarchal structure becoming in essence a patriarchal matriarch. Tita, whose nature is suppressed, develops the power to subvert Mama Elena's oppression of her nature, yet is unable to use her power to free herself from her familial role. Thus in Esquivel's novel, female repression is enacted by woman upon woman. In *Laugh of the Medusa*, Cixous writes:

Men have committed the greatest crime against women. Insidiously, violently, they have led them to hate women, to be their own enemies, to mobilize their immense strength against themselves, to be the executants of their virile needs. They have made for women an anti-narcissism! A narcissism which loves itself only to be loved for what women haven't got! They have constructed the infamous logic of anti-love. (310).

Ultimately Esquivel's novel of gender suppression and the resulting power of subversion is her attempt to speak, as Cixous would suggest, "as woman, toward woman . . . in her inevitable struggle against conventional man; and of a universal woman subject who must bring women to their senses and to their significant meaning in history" (308). Women, forced into silence through class, wealth, or

position, are capable, as Tita demonstrates, of negotiating a voice by whatever elaborate, fantastic means available at their disposal.

Even though Tita knew the truth about her mother, her guilt for not understanding brought on Mama Elena's ghost. When Tita thought she was pregnant by Pedro, Mama Elena pays her a visit in the kitchen accusing her of blackening her family's reputation by immorality. Yet accurately it was Tita's guilt, since she was not pregnant (173). So the only way Tita was ever going to rid herself of her mother was to stand up to her and resist her. When Tita had makes dinner for her mother, Mama Elena brutally rejects her kindness. Tita cannot not understand why her mother treats her cruelly, "she didn't understand Mama Elena's attitude . . . It was beyond her comprehension that one person, whatever her relationship with another, could reject the kind gesture in such a brutal manner . . ." (130-131).

Patriarchal society compels women to be the objects of men and work in different bars to quench the sexual thirst of males. To strengthen this point, Kate Millet says:

Men do whatever they want, and women never object. The 'pimp' feels his superiority through sexuality, which is associated with power. A man likes his own pleasure, and the pain and humiliation he imposes on his partner 'who is nothing but an object to him in the most literal sense.' (20)

The novel is a reflection of the ruthless scenario of dogmatic, authoritarian and despotic form of repression in the name of gender discrimination. This is reflected in Pedro's advance towards Tita. When Tita asks Pedro what he is doing in her room, "Without answering, Pedro went to her, extinguished the lamp, pulled her to a brass bed that had once belonged to her sister Gertrudes, and throwing himself upon her,

caused her to lose her virginity" (144). Though they have been in love for a long time, Pedro does not care for Tita's feelings; he only uses her as an object.

Finally, toward the end of the book, mother and daughter were finally face-to-face on even ground. Mama Elena's ghost, Tita's imagination, lashed out at her daughter, "You and Pedro are shameless . . . you behave like a good woman, or a decent one at least!" (199). Tita, because of having read her mother's diary and love letters finally got peace when she said, "What do you mean, decent? Like you? . . . Or didn't you have an illicit child? . . . I hate you, I've always hated you!" (199). This is how Tita resists her mother as Tita finally wins and triumphs over her domineering mother when she orders Tita to shut her mouth:

I know who I am! A person who has a perfect right to live her life as she pleases. Once and for all, leave me alone; I won't put up with you! I hate you, I've always hated you!' Tita had said the magic words that would make Mama Elena disappear forever.' The imposing figure of her mother began to shrink until it became no more than a tiny light. As the ghost faded away, a sense of relief grew inside Tita's body. The inflammation in her belly and the pain in her breasts began to subside. The muscles at the centre of her body relaxed, loosening violent menstrual flow. (180)

Thus, feminist regard women's body as inferior and weak. Now modern feminists have attempted to counter this claim. So, in the emergent feminist theory, the body becomes a central focus of more practical concerns, which led to a more positive theorization. Despite an initially widespread emphasis in the need for women to escape the relations of reproduction, the reproductive body of female became a site for the reconceptualization of the feminine.

The conflict between mother and daughter begins when Mama Elena felt guilty at making her daughter observe tradition. Mama Elena must have loved Tita very much, and it is safe to say that Tita's mother was afraid of losing the only other person that she truly loved. But because of her loss of José she did not know how to show true affection.

Eventually, Tita breaks away from the Mexican tradition that she has been a victim of as she argues with her sister Rosaura. Tita says, "And I am going to break with it several more times if I have to, as long as this cursed tradition doesn't take me into account. I had the same right to marry as you did, and you had no right to stand between two people who were deeply in love" (192). When Rosaura speaks in favour of maintaining the tradition as she wants her own daughter to stay unmarried and take care of herself, Tita vehemently resists:

One thing is for sure. I'm not going to allow you to poison your daughter with those sick ideas you have in your head. I am not going to let you ruin her life either, forcing her to follow some stupid tradition" (194).

This is how Tita resists the long followed patriarchal tradition in the De la Garza family. She ends up being a rebel, who finally subverts the dictates of patriarchy in Mexican society.

In this way, Tita resists her oppression in two ways: directly challenging her mother and through her culinary skills. Tita's use of food, for example, is used as a narrative device that point towards the way in which woman are faced with "rules she has not made and over which she has no control" (123). It is through food that Tita both compares and understands her own emotional and physical state: It "was then that she understood how dough feels when it is plunged into boiling oil (21); "She felt

so lost and lonely! One last chilly in walnut sauce left on the platter after a fancy dinner couldn't feel any worse than she did" (61). Although expressed with humor, such examples are also concrete, thus transcending abstract notions of what it means to be a woman in Mexican society. In this way, the female characters in *Like Water for Chocolate* go against the prescribed roles of tradition in Mexican society.

### **III. Affirmation of Feminine Role in *Like Water for Chocolate***

After the detailed analysis of this research, it attempts to exhibit masterful portrayal of female revolt against the family tradition, which exploits, dominates, objectifies and limits the female agency. The novel *Like Water for Chocolate* focuses on mostly female characters that assume the gender roles typically associated with men. The characters are presented in such a way that they question any preconceptions previously held about the capabilities of women. Generally dealing with the idea that men have historically been thought of as superior to women, the feminist philosophy contends that men and women are equal and thus deserve equal treatment. So, by this way this novel also shows that females can be bold, strong and rebellious if they cross the climax of suffering and exploitation at the hand of males in conventional society through radical actions of two sisters: Tita and Gertrudis. They question the family tradition of Mexico and want to subvert it. The novel presents the real situation of women in Mexican society through the central characters, who fight against social, political, economical and other marginalization of women under social limitation.

The novel *Like Water for Chocolate* moves around Tita's struggle for independence from birth to death, focusing mostly on her conflict with her oppressive mother, tortured relationship with Pedro, and her struggle and eventual triumph in pursuit of love and individuality. Tita creates a revolution of a kind as well, refusing to abandon her passion for Pedro, resisting her mother's will while Mamá Elena lives, and chasing off the ghost of her dead mother when Mamá Elena tries to control her daughter from beyond the grave. By her example and through her stubborn refusal to allow Rosaura to dictate her daughter's future, Tita most certainly helps to liberate Esperanza from the twin curse of duty and tradition. In this way, there are clear

feminist overtones in *Like Water for Chocolate* in which, Esquivel points to a more radical definition of feminism.

On the other hand, Gertrudis is also a bold character who wants to change the conventional concept upon females. She wants to be free from the patriarchal society. She, keeping desire for independency, leaves the home, runs off with a soldier of the revolution, jumping behind him on his horse and galloping away like males and finally works in a brothel, which is unacceptable in the patriarchal society. She then essentially takes on a male role, becoming a soldier herself, rising to the rank of general, participating actively in the revolution rather than being one of the women who traditionally look after home and children.

The novel not only challenges the time honoured practice of viewing female as domesticated creatures, but also has set up a trend of depicting women as powerful and independent beings in Latin American literature.

To conclude, Tita and Gertrudis, ignoring the family tradition and crossing the four walls of their homes, struggle in search of freedom and identity in the society. Their politics of behavior through different forms of action make other people conscious about freedom and self-respect. In this sense, they contribute to the reformation of existing family tradition, culture and other system to establish the equality between men and women. The novel breaks the barriers of social epochs of their times defying voice of protest within the framework of family tradition established by patriarchy.

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