



Archives of Unspeakability: Food, Materiality and Emotional Aphasia in *Indubala Bhaters Hotel*

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Abstract

It is out of a recent turn in critical research that objects have started being taken seriously as potent elements in a circuit of emotional transaction. In *The Politics of Nature* (2004), Latour suggests that objects can be actants – “source[s] of action” (237) – that can “make a difference, produce effects, alter the course of events”. Building on this idea, I would like to use the scope of this paper to look into the potential that food carries as a mnemonic tool and as a critical “actant” in a cycle of affective or *e-motional* exchange. Memory and food have been found to be intrinsically related in various past research, and present an association the tenacity of which can hardly be challenged. But what is it about food that makes it such a powerful site of (re)constructing memory? What specific memories does food have the ability to etch? More importantly, in fact, how do those memories invoke nuances from the past in ways that also seek to inform perceptions of the present and visions of the future? To delve deeper into these questions, this paper intends to do a close reading of Kallol Lahiri’s *Indubala Bhaters Hotel* (2017), a Bengali post-partition novel that looks at the protagonist’s struggle in a new country (amidst the volatility wrecked by the Bangladeshi Liberation War and the Naxalite movement in Kolkata) through her navigation of her past memories of food, home and nation. I specifically aim to look into a certain emotional aphasic condition of trauma/displacement survivors in the text, and explore how food becomes an important material avenue for the protagonist to recollect private memories and attempt to survive in an alienated land post partition.

Keywords: Emotional materiality, Aphasia, Food, Memories, Displacement.



From as long as I can remember, my grandmother I have never seen her being remotely amused by the idea of Pujo. For someone who is so heavily invested in all other forms of domestic festivities to take no interest in going out or celebrating what is arguably the greatest cultural event of a Bengali's life has been nothing short of a mystery for me. My peculiar interest in this particular disposition of my grandmother had probably been kindled more by her otherwise jovial descriptions of her childhood memories of Durga Pujo back at her home in what would later become East Pakistan, and subsequently Bangladesh. Staggered at her eerie nonchalance about something that she confesses being so excited about before, I blamed the vagaries of senility for it. This, however, changed last October. Our neighbour had decided to worship the deity at his house – the first of its kind in our vicinity, which otherwise only has local clubs arranging the festival annually. On the last day of the celebration, as the idol was being made ready for immersion, I casually suggested to my grandmother that she takes a final look at it before it is taken away. Imagine my surprise then when, expecting a complete refusal of my half-hearted plea, I found my grandmother running out instantly to take one final look at the idol! What puzzled me was not her acceptance of my rather laid-back suggestion, but the series of her reactions to it. The tremble of her brittle fingers, her frantic limp, the conspicuous tears in her eyes or her final bow down to the goddess – everything seemed different; everything seemed connected to a moment in time that I had no access to. I later understood that it was not the idol that she was bowing to, but her memories of her own *barir pujo* (the worship of the deity at one's own home), the sore recollection of watching the idol get immersed into the local pond and the insurmountable burden of being aware that this here was different, in so many unspeakable ways, from the events of what took place every autumn in Rangpur, her home.

It is out of a very recent turn in critical research that objects have started being taken seriously as potent elements in a circuit of emotional transaction. In *The Politics of Nature* (2004), Latour suggests that objects can be actants – “source[s] of action” (237) – that can “make a difference, produce effects, alter the course of events”. Building on this idea, Bennett (2010) argues that objects possess a “vital materiality” (viii), whereby they have the ability “not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own” (qtd. in Freeman



et al. 5). A part of the particular “effects” that come about in Latour’s conception –emotions and/or affects – are often evoked by encounters with objects; they repeatedly, as Ahmed points out (2004), “stick” and circulate with the latter (qtd. in Kuruoğlu and Ger). While playing a heavily pertinent role in moving individuals into shared ways of feeling, thinking, and acting, emotions (also deriving its own meaning from the act of being moved) are also frequently aided by the presence of crucial objects that kickstart the cycle of affective or e-motional exchange. *My grandmother’s fingers started trembling at the idea of looking at the idol of a house-deity after years, her eyes filled with water as soon as she glanced at it, she started blabbering words that did not make sense to most of us.* Even if we take other examples – a person crying while looking at a dead relative’s picture, a gift triggering someone’s memories of a lost connection or the anger that the partner of an infidelious spouse feels while catching a glimpse of the wedding ring – we have to admit that we are surrounded by multifarious instances in which emotions become materially constituted. As Gosden contends, emotions are regularly induced in people by objects as the latter embody links to people, places and events (qtd. in Harris and Sørensen), and are often fundamentally produced through one’s material engagement with the world outside.

Alongside the links that Gosden talks about, objects often also stand as signifiers of a relationship to the past. The idea of what is former, of what once was and is no more, is often construed through intersections of sensation, experience, and meaning that arise through our interactions with material forms (Freeman et al. 4). Scholars like Brown have in fact built on this idea and used it to significantly differentiate between the nature of objects and things. Things, in contrast to objects, Brown says, have more aura and more distance; they are constituted by human relationships with objects and are therefore imbued with memory. Objects become mnemonic instruments when they become part of a meaningful assemblage, when they have rubbed up against the human in a memorable way (or when the human has rubbed up against them), and when traces of past experiences have been created with and held within them (qtd. in Freeman et al. 4). Latour (2000) insists that things do not exist without being full of people (10). To add to that, neither do things exist without being full of memory, of the past, of moments lost in history.

Through the ways that we touch things, or interact with them, we taste a little bit of whatever is gone, and try (and often fail) to make sense of moments that we have lived and



lost. And while a lot of different objects, and their varied natures, could have been discussed in this context, my specific interest in this paper lies in the potential that food entails as a mnemonic tool. Memory and food have been found to be intrinsically related in various past research, and present an association the tenacity of which can hardly be challenged. But what is it about food that makes it such a powerful site of (re)constructing memory? What specific memories does food have the ability to etch? More importantly in fact, how do those memories invoke nuances from the past in ways that also seek to inform perceptions of the present and visions of the future?

One reason for food being such an efficacious harbinger of memory would probably lie in the notes of sensuality that the act of eating entails. The smell, taste and tactility of food often help in engaging and transmitting pertinent mnemonic cues, proving it to be a particularly intense and compelling medium for memory (Holtzman 373). Food also, to a large extent, is a cultural construct, which oscillates remarkably between the intimate and the public at the same time. Although eating has a deeply private component, food is integrally constituted through its open sharing, whether in rituals, feasts, reciprocal exchange, or contexts in which it is bought and sold (Holtzman 373). Even in the most disembodied circumstances, food serves as a powerful link between individual bodies and collective institutions.

Because eating habits are so socially and culturally grounded, and food in itself has a certain polytemporality associated to it (we always look forward to eating something we like in the future – what Sutton calls “prospective memory” – or remember past memories of eating a particular item while devouring it in the present), food memories serve as such strong negotiators of identity, and often become an important tool for building images of the home, the family and the nation. Many studies consider the creation of nation through the invention, standardization, or valorization of a national cuisine, often drawing on Anderson’s (1983) conception of the imagined community and Hobsbawm’s (1983) conception of invented tradition. Cookbooks are one important avenue for this process; for instance, in Appadurai’s (1988) classic study of the creation of Indian national cuisine through cookbooks from the 1960s–1980s, where forging the nation out of distinct regions is a prominent trope (qtd. in Holtzman 368). Even in contexts of diasporic literature, food is frequently looked at as an avenue that connects one to one’s lost homeland, and helps in providing a temporary return to a time when their lives were not fragmented.



The idea of home, to a large extent, is transferable. And it is often through food, both through its memories and recipes, that such a transferral takes place. As the aroma of edibles fills one's dining room, and the voices of members spill out from the kitchen, food's synesthetic charm creates an intimate bond that reflects remembrance of vital experiences of familial communion, and often expresses what historian Cruz Miguel Ortíz Cuadra terms "sensations of entanglement" in his discussion of "palate memory" (2). Interestingly, the food memories that we link to our homes have a specific quality of embodiment in them. One does not only eat and talk over food at home, but also take part in the process of making food in one or the other way. Kneading bread playfully, looking after the curry on the oven lest it does not burn while our mothers are away, stealing a bite of one's favourite dish – the kitchen often becomes a performative space that nurtures thousands of habitual, tactile, sensory memories.

A significant part of many literatures on crisis focuses on food memories. What happens when one forcibly snatches away the communal out of a collective practice like food-making (and cherishing) is possibly a subject that interests many. My paper specifically aims to look at a post-partition novel that looks at the protagonist's struggle in a new country through her navigation of her past memories of food, home and nation. Successors of many partition survivors would perhaps attest to the fact that many of them held on to their family recipes almost obsessively, in a desperate attempt to hold on to the last bit of what was left of their home. Kallol Lahiri's 2017 novel *Indubala Bhatar Hotel* narrates the tale of Indubala, which unfolds against the context of a forced immigration and the desolation of having to leave one's roots. Intriguingly, Lahiri's novel was first published serially chapter wise on his blog, where it gained such popular traction that many publishers themselves reached his door to request publication access from him. The author's roots reside in Bangladesh too; he remembers growing up listening to memories of Khulna and its food from his father and grandfather. Taking a blend of the generational turn of those memories and a touch of his own poetic imagination, he curated the story of Indubala, who, despite losing essentially everything in her life holds on frantically to family recipes and gustative memories.

Plating Indubala: Meals, Migration, Mourning

Lahiri's novel traverses through a nonlinear timeframe that spans over several decades. At the very outset of the novel we are introduced to the eponymous Indubala, who, in her seventies,



is seen scrupulously running her pice hotel in the heart of Kolkata. As the narrative (which is also interestingly intersected quite often by intricate details of food preparations) takes us back and forth, we learn that Indubala, originally a resident of Kolapota village in the district of Khulna in East Pakistan, was married off to a school teacher in Kolkata while in her early teens. Indubala's hasty marriage severed her ties with her home and her motherland quite abruptly; while her mother-in-law dictated that she solely focused on mending the ways of her alcoholic husband, the volatility of the violence that was set off by the Bangladesh Liberation War and the Naxalite movement in Kolkata forced her to not look back on her life behind in Kolapota. Disconsolate and alone, Indubala seeks solace in sensory reminiscences of her home, mostly falling back on fond memories of culinary or gastronomic indulgences. What starts off as a means to remember Kolapota, remarkably becomes her only mode of survival throughout the novel.

Having lost all of her connections early in life – her father and grandmother die soon after her marriage, and her brother and mother are killed later by Pakistani militants – Indubala finds it impossible to take recourse to normative emotional expression. In one part of the novel, she says that everything had “dried up” inside her (8). In another instance, she confesses not being able to express her love for her children like other mothers would. Instead, she attempts to convey her feelings through a more material medium – food:

Indubala's children had understood from their childhood that their mother's love was different. It was difficult to count the variety of foods that she used to store for them in enormous jars, glass bottles and aluminium boxes. Coconut balls in some, sweetmeat delicacies in another, flattened and fried rice, crunchy savouries, deep fried *gojas*¹. (124)²

Interestingly, the first chapter also opens with an unusual description of the jars that customers found every day in Indubala's hotel: “No one would be able to guess from outside what those jars hid within themselves. Only those who come to have their meals here every day know” (7). There is a certain arcana that fastens the relationship between Indubala's customers and

¹Small fried wheat flour pieces dipped in sugar syrup.

²All translations in the paper from hereon are mine.



her, a bond that surpasses an overt sentimental proclamation and depends entirely on material transmission. Even though Indubala's pice hotel starts out of a dire economic need that arises due to her husband's untimely death, it stands as the greatest testament of its owner's intense sentimental engagement with objects, and more importantly, her untattered relationship with her homeland (the taste of whose *Bangal* food also fascinatingly gets mixed up with the *Ghoti* ways of cooking that she picks up from her mother-in-law³).

It would not be a grave overstatement to say that Indubala's emotional entanglement with materials (and especially, food) was possibly passed on down from her family. Her mother too is seen sending her edibles from Pakistan after her marriage. One has to remember that these people, bereft of any telephonic or written mode of communication, had no other channel to reach out to each other, let alone share their longings, desires or sorrows. What other avenues do these people then, displaced and detached, use to express feelings? Sending food possibly becomes one of the more expedient options, given that it not only carries within itself a touch of home, but also helps in giving a more cognizable, material form to emotions that are otherwise difficult to pronounce. Terry Eagleton in his article "Edible Écriture" argues that food is endlessly interpretable – "it can be a gift, threat, poison, recompense, barter, seduction, solidarity, suffocation" (par. 3). In the text at hand, food perhaps becomes a bridge, for both Indubala and her mother, that works against their "dried-up" cores, and gives a more tangible, concrete shape to bare sentiments, an indulgence in which otherwise feels like a nefarious opulence in times of war-torn brutality.

To add to the exploration of the versatility of food as an emotive medium, Lahiri also quite adeptly addresses the difficulty of clear, vocal emotional pronouncements in the text. Because it is sometimes so common or convenient to utter sentiments or give words to what is inside our heads, it becomes difficult to understand that verbal emotional engagement often becomes a matter of privilege, especially when thought of in the context of victims of trauma

³ The *Bangal-Ghoti* feud is an extremely pertinent cultural dispute that has sustained itself in the landscape of Bengal since the late 1940s. The *Bangals* were the sub-group of Bengalis, mainly Hindus, who had to emigrate from East Pakistan and settle in India after the Partition, while the *Ghotis* were the original inhabitants of what came to be known as West Bengal. Amongst other things, *Bangals* and *Ghotis* are known to fight heavily on their culinary tastes, techniques and preferences, often claiming their respective cuisine to be better than the other's.



and displacement. In more instances than one, emotional expression takes up a great amount of strength, courage and acceptance (of one's present life and its future possibilities). Perhaps it is on this account that Indubala significantly falters. Early on in the novel, when she admits that the tale of her life is replete with micro stories of how desperately she loved the people that she eventually lost, one could perhaps read in the confession a peculiar kind of regret. Indubala is vulnerable, suspicious, and scared of professing her affection in words. In one of the most poignant sections in the book, we see Indubala stifling a harrowing cry in the kitchen by putting a piece of cloth in her mouth, lest her helper Dhananjay finds out and calls her sons:

What if her children get to know how much their mother loved them? Indubala does not want anyone to ever know about her affection. Whoever she has loved has been taken away from the world. This has been a perpetual curse in her life. She did not want to go through the agonizing pain of losing a child at this age. (132)

While one can find in the protagonist an oft-repeated visceral, affective reaction (body shuddering, an excruciating cry bellowing in her heart, a feeling of nausea), her engagement with emotions is quite limited. In fact, in many parts of the novel, Indubala comes off across as a stern and dispassionate old woman. It is her experience with trauma and displacement that makes her suffer from what I call emotional aphasia. Even when she feels sentiments of some intensity, Indubala prefers "stifling" them down, and not giving words to them in any form. This is also why she tries to project her love for her children as an inescapable duty, the culmination of which comes after their respective marriages, following which she orders them to go away and arrange their own households elsewhere without her.

Unconsciously, though, Indubala's strongest challenge to her aphasia comes through her relentless search for objects that would help her express her feelings less conspicuously. In an early part of the novel, she professes being unable to talk about her feelings of agony and despair to anyone. Instead, she finds peace in knowing that the trees around her, the birds, the drops of rain are equal companions in her sorrow. She constantly tries materializing her emotions through the ontological existence of objects – sometimes she is as lonely as the coconut tree (40), or sometimes she is envious of the train that touches her home every day (67). This is probably also why she piles away souvenirs of famished memories in her accounting copy – flowers, bay leaves, fingerprints, lost pamphlets, lines of songs – and keeps



it away from the public eye. For Indubala, memories are personal, corporeal; they are things she can touch, sniff, hold in the folds of her mother’s saree (54), and feel when she embraces her brother:

Indubala holds her brother in a tight embrace. Out of nowhere, all of a sudden, Kolapota touches her. The pond in the Bose residence. The paddy field at the end of the wilderness. Pickles made of sour wood apples. (75)

She remembers vividly – the last stare before someone’s death, her husband’s serpentine movement up her body, the nonpareil smell of ponds – and finds her existence being reflected in the subsistence of banal, everyday materials. This perhaps becomes the most prominent when she talks about her failure to sustain a piper chilli vine that she had planted: “The plant did not survive. It had also perhaps realised that the existence of a refugee had its own share of burdens” (148).

In her quest for materials to express her feelings, Indubala mostly takes recourse to a variety of food items. She has a curious relationship with food; it is possibly the only thing that she considers her own – something that the world had not (and could not) snatch away from her. It is thus obvious that her way of appeasing an angry ticket-checker comes in the form of offering him sweetmeat balls, and her intention to commemorate a loved one’s memory is reflected through her dedicating a dish to their name. The greatest instance of this however comes through her reminiscence of her love for Monirul, her school friend in Pakistan: “...[S]he found Monirul very sweet. Exactly like those slices of raw mangoes that you eat with a serving of mustard oil, green chillies and sugar” (34). While the connection between a confession of teenage love and eating might have certain erotic undertones hidden underneath it, what becomes more important here is Indubala’s specific attempt to redefine her retrospective narrative by searching for a more tangible way to express emotions she had long renounced.

In the list of materials Indubala feels hopeful, excited or delighted about, the hotel perhaps becomes the greatest symbol of her mystifying emotive connection to objects. Historically, pice hotels blossomed in the cityscape of Kolkata in the early 1900s, as eateries that offered nourishing meals to various migrant labourers, students and office-goers at extremely low, affordable prices (the name ‘pice’ itself is derived from the word ‘paisa’ – the



lowest denomination of the Indian currency). Indubala’s hotel too became a familiar spot for various students, professionals and Naxal revolutionaries alike, and quickly gained mass recognition for the owner’s dexterous qualities as a cook and host. In a world whose “illusionary ties” (11) Indubala self-confessedly wanted to avoid, the hotel stood for everything that she had loved and lost: “Every time Indubala entered into the kitchen, she remembered the courtyard back in her home in Kolapota” (72). She hoards even the smallest things in her hotel – from the broom to a matchstick (47) – and refuses to give them up, rendering them the only companions of her otherwise lonely days. Her description of the hotel as a secluded island is thus apposite – “Indubala remained alone with her pice hotel. All alone” (10). The hotel was her sole support on days of forlornness, and her only means to travel to memories of the past. But most importantly, it was a Gordian tribute to her love for food and the elaborate ways in which the latter provided her opportunities to purge out unsaid dreams, desires and passions.

Intriguingly, food is not only established as an element in a cycle of emotional transmission in the novel, but is also treated as a device of honouring lost memories. The local collector, we learn in the beginning of the novel, was so moved by eating at Indubala’s hotel that it ended up reminding him of his dead mother. On other occasions, Indubala is seen remembering key events of her maiden life from her recollection of the food that she had on those particular days. For instance, the day that Ratanlal Master’s matrimonial proposal comes to Indubala’s house was the day that her house, she recalls, was filled with the aroma of “steamed rice cakes” and “*khichudi*⁴”:

The groom was a ‘master’, nothing short, and had a two-storeyed house of his own. Distinguished, aristocratic lineage.[...]There was only a small flaw.

“Flaw?” Thamma was making steamed rice cakes that day.[...]*Khichudi* was being made of sunned rice in the cooking pot. The potato had already been diced into small pieces. Indubala had gathered some non-seasonal raw tomatoes from the garden. Before putting the *khichudi* down from fire, Thamma had sprinkled a few drops of ghee home-made from Horimoti’s milk over it. Sitting down to eat the *khichudi* that had

⁴ A dish made of rice and lentils.



mesmerised the entire Kolapota with the heavenly aroma of its ghee infused rice, Indubala had heard the word “*dojobor*⁵” for the first time. (32)

What is interesting about this extract is the significance that this particular moment carries for Indubala later in her life. Not only was this the first time she heard the name of the man she would soon be betrothed to, but she learns almost immediately that he is looking for a wife for the second time. However, we find neither shock nor resistance in Indubala’s recollection. What we find instead is an elaborate description of the meal that she had that day. While on one hand, that perhaps indicates Indubala’s own innocent non-comprehension of the heaviness of the situation, on the other, it stands out as a greater symbol of her inclination to look back at the major events in her life through gastronomic imageries, in an attempt to perhaps consciously forget about the crude actuality of the incidents in question and focus on other comparatively insignificant details instead.

The protagonist’s habit of basing her emotional or mnemonic responses on small objects and minor details is reflected in other instances too. In crucial moments in the text, we find the septuagenarian protagonist visibly ecstatic to see pumpkin flowers blooming in her backyard or to find raw mangoes falling down from the trees in the whims of a thunderstorm. There is a certain histrionic, bodily impulse in many of her reactions. This embodied, performative quality also often gets manifested in the ways in which Indubala cooks or eats food. It becomes most evident in the tragic sequence in which she gets to know from her brother that her grandmother had passed away. Pregnant, an oblivious Indubala was coincidentally reminiscing about her grandmother’s *Malpoa*⁶ when her brother came in, bearing the bad news. Heartbroken, Indubala still makes arrangements for her brother’s unexpected welcome and gives her share of meal to him. When he dozes off to sleep, an inexplicable hunger grasps her:

The baby is kicking notoriously inside her. Like his mother, he too is famished. There was no rice in the kitchen... What would she eat at this time of the day? Suddenly the *saal* leaf wrapped basket that her brother had brought in caught Indubala’s attention.[...]She had forgotten entirely about it. She slowly unwrapped it and looked at the rows of *malpoa-s* placed neatly inside.

⁵ A man getting married for the second time.

⁶ A sweetened pancake.



Indubala's eyes welled up. She started devouring it ravenously.[...]If not the ones that Thamma prepared, she could at least quench her body's tumultuous longing through the *malpoa-s* that the local confectioner had made. When she finally stopped after gobbling down a considerable number of *malpoa-s*, she felt an immense thirst. But there was no one to offer even one drop of water around. She had heard no one had been able to offer Thamma water either in her deathbed. Every drop had rolled down her cheek.

At that moment Indubala wanted to bellow a heart wrenching, voice shattering cry for Thamma. The earth beneath her feet started shaking, she started seeing black in front of her eyes. Whatever she had eaten, she puked it out entirely. The kitchen flooded in the to-be-mother's vomit. (79)

What is meaningful here is that Indubala remembers her grandmother through an act of eating, that derives its entire significance from its peculiar quality of embodiment. The way in which she eats "ravenously" or later searches for water like she imagines her dead grandmother too had are in certain ways acts of corporeal and performative remembrance. To add to that, she vomits out whatever she eats, signifying a space of bodily non-acceptance (of food and of the devastation of the situation at hand). It is moreover interesting that Indubala only feels the urge to cry once she eats the sweets, but also ultimately finds herself incapable of crying, and ends up vomiting whatever she had eaten instead, thus highlighting the queer case of her emotional aphasia even more.

Most of the deaths in Indubala's life is marked by this aphasic quality. She attributes certain dishes to the memory of her dead husband and mother-in-law. While both of these people had been reasons for concern and anxiety in her life, what is surprising is that no mention of Indubala crying is given even in the context of her best friend, Lachmi passing away in an accident. Incidentally, fish-seller Lachmi was Indubala's inspiration and financial source behind starting the Pice Hotel. Sisters of wretched fates, both Lachmi and Indubala turned into each other's greatest allies. When the former passes away in a train accident, Indubala "keeps suppressed the turmoil in her heart" (154) and goes to the police station to complete all necessary formalities. She brings the taro root that Lachmi was carrying (and which she had requested Indubala to make earlier) along with her basket and keeps them in her kitchen. That was also the last day she cooked taro root in her hotel before declaring that she would never



make it in her kitchen again. The trope of refusing to use a certain ingredient after a beloved person's loss that repeats in the novel once again in Indubala's refusing to make her granddaughter's favourite sweet pumpkin curry after she elopes, is pertinent in signifying the value that Indubala gave to materials. She expresses her despair at losing Lachmi only through her complete abstinence from cooking a certain vegetable. Interestingly, it is in the concluding pages of the novel that Indubala agrees to make mashed taro root again at the behest of a young girl from the neighbouring mess. It is also after making this dish that the writer writes of Indubala seeing Lachmi again, and going to sleep peacefully, thus suggesting her probable demise at the end of the text. Even that particular portion is highlighted through some of Indubala's affective reactions and (dis)engagements with certain materials:

Indubala does not feel surprised after seeing Lachmi stand at the kitchen door so many days later. She only babbles, "No one remembers you anymore Lachmi". Lachmi laughs, says nothing. She keeps on staring at Indubala. What is she trying to tell her? An invitation to the eve of her departure?

Indubala feels cold all of a sudden. She climbs up the stairs in haste. Keeping aside the plate of rice that Dhananjay had laid out for her, she lies down under the faint light of the setting sun and goes to sleep beside the jars of pickles, mustard sauce and lentil dumplings. The rays of the disappearing sun in the west fall comfortably on her content, inapprehensive face. (157)

Lahiri's figurative treatment of Indubala's death is crucial in terms of my own concerns with emotional materiality in this paper. Her death is notably symbolised through her rejection of an engagement with the objects around. It comes in the form of a peaceful sleep, and a detachment from materials, and more importantly, her own hand-made foods and condiments. Metaphorically, such a rejection suggests an end to Indubala's need to emote at all, thus putting an end to the narrative of her life as well.

Conclusion

In a 1993 essay, literary theorist Peter Stallybrass evocatively described his experience of dealing with the death of his close friend, Allon White. In the process of mourning, Stallybrass' countless efforts to actively invoke memories of Allon proved futile. Frustrated and hopeless,



Sallybrass however finally found a part of his friend quite serendipitously – by wearing a hand-sewn jacket that both of them had worn throughout their friendship. Intriguingly, Sallybrass’ reunion with his deceased friend is constituted through the materiality of the shared jacket when it, for a brief moment, becomes Allon himself: “...he was there in the stains at the very bottom of the jacket; he was there in the smell of the armpits” (36).

Sallybrass’ story is extremely important in its refutation of the idea that “memory [is] about minds rather than things” (Sallybrass 47), and suggests instead that we seldom remember through thoughts only, but rather through our experiences with objects, and through embodiments and dis embodiments collected in tangible remnants and belongings. Indubala’s journey speaks of a similar effort. Food, through its ritualistic significance, helps Indubala both in recollection and survival. Curiously, it is Indubala’s own legacy as a culinary connoisseur that would perhaps mark her own public remembrance post-death. It would not be a surprise if her book of recipes opens up future possibilities of becoming a mnemonic tool itself with further potential for (re)performativity and circulation. Lahiri’s text stands out because he, in unusual ways like these, makes the reader think of newer, imaginative alternatives in which memories can be constructed and diasporic trauma can be understood better. Because, for the expatriate, what gets left out eventually is the bare inconvenience of remembering – a frantic turn of Indubala’s ladle, a trace of my grandmother’s restless limp, a choked cry within a refugee’s throat.



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