

Forbidden Love, Meat and Cannibalism: An Analysis of Bhaskar Hazarika's *Aamis (Ravening)*

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Abstract

This paper attempts to explore *Aamis (Ravening)* (2019), an Assamese film from India, written and directed by Bhaskar Hazarika. The film chronicles a story of passion between Nirmali, a married woman, and Sumon, a young researcher. Sumon, a meat connoisseur, studying the meat eating habits of different communities, serves as a metafictional strategy of the film. Meat becomes a mode of showcasing liminality and the body politic. The two create a carnivalesque world for themselves, where meat becomes a medium of expressing their unprofessed desire. With the turn of events, Sumon makes Nirmali taste his own flesh, camouflaging it as an exotic meat resulting in Nirmali's extreme yearning for human flesh. Nirmali undergoes a process of 'unfinalizability', revealing a side to herself that she had never known. *Aamis* through its surrealistic portrayal of cannibalism brings forth the grotesque and the macabre. Nirmali's desire for human meat turns her into a monstrous 'other'. Sumon and Nirmali become figures of 'homo-sacer', beyond the control of the state. In the concluding scene, for the first time Nirmali touches Sumon in public, with their faces covered by cloth. The markers of identity become ineffectual by then. Almost indifferent to the world around them, they stand as lovers hand in hand, who had tasted that which is "forbidden".

Keywords: Food, Culture, Love, Meat, Cannibalism, Forbidden

Introduction

She had never eaten food like this before. No: she had never eaten before. It was as if these flavors had always existed, had always been there in her imagination, but now she was tasting them properly for the very first time. (Capella 80)

The quote from Anthony Capella's *The Food of Love* aptly describes Nirmali's experience of eating her lover's flesh for the first time in the film *Aamis (Ravening)* (2019). *Aamis* is an Assamese film from India, written and directed by Bhaskar Hazarika. The film chronicles a story of passion between Nirmali, a married woman, and Sumon, a young researcher.

The film projects a narrative that is rather avant-gardist, something never seen in the history of Assamese cinema. Nirmali and Sumon's gastronomical journey of eating meat and

eventual turn towards addictive yearning for human meat is what marks the film as an exercise in surrealism and the macabre. *Aamis* which means “meat” in Assamese is a reference to a ravenous appetite for human meat, an aspect commonly considered as taboo and forbidden by societal norms. The paper attempts to analyze *Aamis* and explore its depiction of love, food, culture, culinary practices and cannibalistic reverberations.

Bhaskar Hazarika is a National Award-winning filmmaker from Assam, India. His oeuvre includes the successful and critically acclaimed film *Kotha Nodi* based on the folklore of Assam. *Aamis* is a clear departure from his earlier work and attempts to portray a worldview that appears to be jarring, intense, yet alluring. The film was also premiered at the 18th Tribeca Film Festival in New York. The cast includes Lima Das, playing the role of Nirmali, Arghadeep Baruah as Suman, supported by actors like Neetali Das, Manash K Das, Sagar Saurabh, and Uddipta K Bhattacharya among others. The film also received the best director award and the best female actor award at the 3rd Singapore South Asian International Film Festival (SAIFF) in 2019. As indicated above, the title “Aamis” refers to “meat” in Assamese. The English title *Ravening* on the other hand denotes an intense craving. The two terms, however, cannot be seen as separate entities, whereby *Aamis* deftly portrays the extreme yearning for meat. The meat within the context of the film serves as a metaphor for love.

Everyday Life, Food and Culture

Hazarika’s story begins in medias res in modern day Guwahati. Nirmali who is a pediatrician by profession, is caught in the web of domesticity. She is a doting mother to her son. Her husband Dilip, is mostly away from home for work.

Lefebvre in *Critique of Everyday Life* juggles issues pertaining to the status of the everyday life of humans in the modern times and argues that there is a schism between the “private consciousness and the public consciousness” (Lefebvre 238). Lefebvre dispels the

triviality associated with the everyday inner life of individuals evokes Kierkegaard to explain the mysterious secret lives of people caught in the mundanities of life (Lefebvre 239). Lefebvre expounds that the “everyday life of the modern man...is tragically controlled by unresolved contradictions” (Lefebvre 244).

This is something that eventually reflects upon the decisions Nirmali takes in the course of the narrative. Nirmali continues to detest any kind of affection beyond the sanctity of marriage. She is often seen reprimanding her friend Jumi for her illicit affairs. Jumi serves as a foil for Nirmali in the choices she makes for the sake of passion.

Sumon chances upon Nirmali while searching for a doctor for his friend who had fallen sick after consuming meat. The sickness of Sumon’s friend caused by meat forebodes a sense of impending peril. After their initial meeting what follows is a series of events that alter their life course forever. Nirmali is at once intrigued by the “Meat Club” that Sumon talks about. Sumon, a PhD Student, is researching the meat-eating practices and traditions of Northeast India. Food, specifically meat, becomes a vehicle of dialogue between the two. There is a primitive lure to the way Sumon delineates different meats and eating habits of people. The burgeoning relationship between Nirmali and Sumon is beyond the norms of acceptability within their society. Despite being aware of the forbidden nature of their relationship, they continue to meet and share anecdotes over their meat eating encounters. The two cherish each other's company and share life stories as they move along their journey of tasting different kinds of meat. In Plato's *The Symposium* there is a connection drawn between food and sharing stories. Plato harps on the importance of dialogue in a symposium along with food consumption, Howatson in the introduction to the work notes that -“Although symposia were places to indulge in physical pleasures of food, drink...they were also a place to cultivate the pleasures of the mind” (Howatson ix). The gradual blossoming of the friendship creates a spark in Nirmali’s otherwise dull life; the food and conversations add to the pleasures of the mind.

Eating is intrinsically related to cultural tropes and habits. The politics of segregation and communication run through discourses on food, as seen in the works of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Roland Barthes. Barthes in “Towards A Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption” notes that food is an essential component of culture and calls it a “a system of communication” (Barthes 21-22). Plato’s *The Symposium* connotes the ideas of communal eating and narrative exchanges and dialogues that take place during the eating experience. The social-political difference in eating behaviours of different communities cannot be evaded here. The power relation that exists between who is eating what, where and how is of great importance in most cultures. Indoctrination of the system of class division is also reflected in food consumption practices.

In the film *Aamis*, a cozy social gathering at Nirmali’s house is a typical homogenous group of people from particular strata, enjoying buoyant spirits and delectable food. Sumon, who almost feels like an outcast amidst them, is seen refusing to eat processed meat. His preferences and demeanour at once make him the ‘other’ among all. Sumon in many ways is the mysterious other whose background or familial affiliations are seldom mentioned except for his scholarly interest in meat eating communities and its pedantic study. Sumon, a meat connoisseur, is very particular about his choice of meat. His research on the meat eating patterns of different communities serves as a metafictional strategy in the film. Sumon has a rather subjective opinion on the choice of meat used for consumption, emphasizing the cliché that “one man’s food is another man’s poison” as he experiments with a variety of meat, blurring the boundaries of acceptability. In terms of food and eating culture, Mary Douglas in “Deciphering a Meal” notes that “the message is about different degrees of hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and transactions across the boundaries. Like sex, the taking of food has a social component, as well as a biological one. Food categories therefore encode social

events” (Douglas 249). Douglas suggests that the meanings of meals are rooted in the social structures and the very act of eating then becomes a political act. (Douglas 260)

Raising questions on moral codes, meat eating practices, forbidden relationships and cannibalism, the film subverts the overarching notions of acceptability and conventionality. The story from the North East of India projects gastronomical experiences placed within the broad mosaic of the diverse eating practices of the country. Sumon is researching the meat eating traditions and habits of people from north eastern India. He is on an explorative journey to unravel undocumented information on divergent meat eating practices. He has complete acquiescence of the fact that no meat or food can be sacrosanct and that the revulsion towards eating certain kinds of meat is not a “proof of human superiority” (Taylor 75). Choices pertaining to food consumption are irrevocably connected to larger social affiliations. At the same time, the subjectivity associated with food consumption is related to not just the nutritional aspects but also has certain political ramifications. Meat is an important source of food amongst the people in North East India. A sense of conflict in terms of the insider and outsider debate with regards to mainland India and the North-eastern states is not only related to linguistic diversity (Harriss 1) but is also related to “different” food choices. The film *Aamis* refuses to align with certain notions that meat eating is in any way “morally problematic” (Taylor 75). Without subscribing to any stark political stance the film effectively and implicitly hints at the controversies around certain meat bans and the food choices that people make in the Indian context. The taboos associated with consuming certain meat and fixed notions of identity within the framework of social acceptability are destabilized throughout the narrative.

The Act of Eating and Cooking

The act of eating meat in *Aamis* is presented through moments of calm, slow surrealistic images often laced with great epiphany. Cultural codes and societal norms become insignificant in

Nirmali and Sumon's gastronomical journey. Sumon's discourses on meat draw Nirmali to him and mark the onslaught of her extreme passion for eating meat. Sumon ignites in her a passion that unfolds seamlessly and what results is the fanatic quest for "meat". As Nirmali's desire for meat increases and the "ravaging" grows, Sumon decides to do the unthinkable. With the help of his friend, Sumon cuts a piece of flesh from his body and cooks a dish out of it for Nirmali. Sumon's love for Nirmali is apparent in the ways in which he cooks for her. Visual imagery is presented in a dreamlike sequence that manifests Sumon's yearning to be inside Nirmali's body. Thus, he gives a part of himself to Nirmali to be eaten. Here the emotion is drawn to an extreme, where the female protagonist is literally fed on the flesh of the lover. The taste lingers on, resulting in Nirmali's addiction to and insatiable desire for human flesh.

The act of watching a cinematic experience related to consumption entails the experience of the senses. James R. Keller in *Food, Film and Culture* notes that visual presentations of cooking and eating--"manipulate gustatory imagery in order to increase the sensory response of the film audience to a medium that cannot access smell or taste" (Keller 1). However, as reports suggests, most audiences were filled with horror and disgust at the sight of the protagonist's fascination for human flesh. The sensory imagery and the cultural memory create a cinematic experience that simultaneously posits a sense of awe and disgust. Eating habits and culinary practices are intrinsically a part of the "cultural process" (Keller 1). The responses of the audiences are informed by their shared cultural experiences. The visual projections at once seem jarring, grotesque and also give rise to a sense of wonderment. The ocular representation of the desire/disgust keeps shifting registers allowing audiences to rejoice and recoil at the same time - an understanding often mediated through cultural codes we internalize as audiences. The sensory experience of a film is thus connected to an ideological construct created by the audience. The evocation of both fear and awe is an aspect culturally associated with things unknown and unknowable.

As suggested by James R. Keller, experience of food or taste is usually “social or collective” (Keller 3). In *Aamis* eating together is aesthetically captured. However, as the narrative progresses the delight of eating a meal increasingly moves towards the purview of the forbidden. Nirmali undergoes the Bakhtinian process of “unfinalizability” (Bakhtin 59), revealing a side to herself that she had never known. Nirmali’s decision to consume the flesh of her lover with full acquiescence leaves her distraught yet ever hungry for more. The schism results in Nirmali’s derailment which is nothing but a reflection of the conditioning that she had internalized. That aside, the depiction of the experience of eating the flesh of one’s lover does involve some amount of suspension of disbelief.

The ways in which the characters churn out recipes make the act of cooking appear numinous and aesthetically pleasing. The cooking scenes come across as a trance like representation of love--A love that is deep-seated within and yet to be realized. The artistic manifestation brings out inner creativity and passion within Sumon. Cooking as a performative act of potential sensory experience is loaded with images of physicality. The way the act of preparing the human flesh is portrayed, it almost translates as an act of creation of art. The narrative dissolves into a heightening sensory experience of intense musical interludes. The cooking space becomes a site of artwork and that of the sensual experience. The kitchen traditionally associated with women and exploitation turns into a domain of art, virtuosity and transgression. As Sumon creates a delicacy out of his own flesh, a literal extension of himself for Nirmali, the very look and presentation reflects his creative genius. There is celebration of desire and the disgust, evidently questioning the heteronormative notions of the cooking space. The banal, domestic space of the kitchen becomes a source of the carnivalesque, destabilizing normative understanding of desire, appetite and love.

The “Carnavalesque” as a term has its roots in Bakhtin’s *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, and its further delineation in *Rabelais and His World* connotes a sense of liberation

from the power dynamics that define everyday life, in a way also to be beyond it. Nirmali and Sumon thus create a carnivalesque world for themselves, where meat becomes a medium for expressing their unprofessed desire.

Sumon cooks the meat dishes for Nirmali with great delight and care. For Nirmali, these meals provide a way to break free from the mundane. From Levis-Strauss' perspective in "The Culinary Triangle" the meat thus prepared falls under the category of "cooked" and not "raw" or "rotted" (Levi-Strauss 36). According to Strauss cooking is a "truly universal form of human activity" (36). The cooking procedures portrayed in *Aamis* do follow more or less the cultural process of food preparation yet subvert those at many levels. It is to be noted that "cooked is a cultural transformation of the raw" (37) and what is to be eaten as raw and what cannot be eaten raw are culturally coded practices (37). In that sense *Aamis* portrays a subtle way of showcasing the fears inherent in our society concerning food/meat consumption. The whole cycle of the flesh being torn from the body in raw form and in a more acceptable version being cooked follows a pattern increasingly verging on the grotesque. Cooking the flesh from his body and turning it into a form of aesthetic meat dish becomes the language of love for Sumon who knows no other way to express the same. Sumon is well aware of the taboo attached to his forbidden love; nevertheless the very act of giving up a part of himself is evidence of his immanent desire for Nirmali.

Nirmali's extreme yearning for human meat propels her to negate almost all markers of civility when she sets out on the road with her lover in search of the meat that she has developed a passion for. Nirmali in a state of "unfinalizability" cannot apparently understand her own behavior. The ravening within is beyond comprehension. The relationship between Nirmali and Sumon grows through their meat eating journeys. Both partake of each other metaphorically, flouting societal inhibitions and combating norms of conventionality. Through their carnivalesque gastronomical journey both eventually acquire the status of the "other".

Nirmali's ravenous appetite for meat pushes her to the brink of her sanity. The meat eating sojourns thus gradually spiral into cannibalistic madness.

Cannibalism and the Heterogeneity of Human Life

The title of this segment is inspired by Mikel Burley's work "Eating Human Beings: Varieties of Cannibalism and the Heterogeneity of Human Life." Burley in this essay brings forth different notions of cannibalism and its practice in certain cultures. A simplistic understanding of cannibalism relates to the practice of eating or consuming human flesh by humans. Burley's work documents that cannibalism has long history, tracing its prevalence and practice in certain communities. Burley takes up the case of the indigenous population of the Wari community to showcase the existence of cannibalistic practices among them. Beth A. Conklin in an earlier work "'Thus Are Our Bodies, Thus Was Our Custom': Mortuary Cannibalism in an Amazonian Society" explores the ritualistic practice of cannibalism among the Wari community of Western Brazil. The Wari population practiced a ritual such as "mortuary cannibalism" as a way to mourn and pay respect to the dead elders (Conklin 75). Burley explores the nuances of the said practice in keeping with the notions put forth by Conklin. Burley, taking Conklin's arguments forward, notes that:

The fact is that cannibalism – the eating of human bodies in whole or in part by other human beings – has occurred in a variety of forms among numerous communities throughout history and across the world. Sometimes it has been forced upon people under conditions of extreme food scarcity; in a small number of instances, which have gained considerable notoriety, it has been carried out to satisfy a sadistic sexual craving on the part of the killer; but in the vast majority of cases it has been an integral component of a culture, one feature of a form of life – a way of being human. (Burley 484)

Thus, Burley seems to emphasize the diverse ways of living and the heterogeneity of human life. There apparently cannot be one way of looking at possibilities of living. The plurality that exists in the varied experiences of people can be seen through the cultural practices of different

communities. That apart, the use of human flesh and body parts in the medical field is seemingly prevalent. Karen Gorgen Grube in “Evidence of Medicinal Cannibalism in Puritan New England: ‘Mummy’ and Related Remedies in Edward Taylor’s ‘Dispensatory’” delineates this aspect of cannibalism. Grube explains the validity of the practice and mentions the term “corpse pharmacology” to discuss the use of the human body and body parts in the preparation of medicines in the 17th century (Grube 185).

Tropes of cannibalism, desire and the yearning for the meat of the lover as a primary theme is also found in certain folklore in India. One such example is the saga of Sohni-Mahiwal, a Punjabi folk tale set in 18th century Punjab. As oral narratives go the story shows how Mahiwal cooks and feeds a part of his thigh to his lover Sohni. There are other such folk tales and stories from the Indian Subcontinent that hint at the practice of cannibalism, like the story of *King Malook*, a folktale from Sindh, *Muree and Mongthar*, *Legends of King Jayaddisa* among others. Some folktales from Bengal too are replete with references to cannibalistic figures like *Sonar Kathi Rugar Kathi*, *Daalim Kumar* etc. The ritualistic practice of cannibalism among the Aghoris of India is also evident; they eat “human meat not because they are cannibals, but because it is part of an intensified ritual” (Kaliff 62). Mentions of cannibals and cannibalistic practices are also found in the certain early Vedic texts, particularly in *Rig Veda* (Oldenberg 174). Thus, it can be seen that cannibalism as a practice is not unheard of within the Indian context, thereby highlighting the heterogeneity of human life.

In terms of Burley's take on cannibalism, the heterogeneity of life and pluralism does not entirely correspond to what Cora Diamond suggests in respect to the discourse on cannibalism, particularly seen in “Eating Meat and Eating People.” Diamond’s essay explores the domain of morality attached to modes of eating. In the essay Diamond mentions the “prejudices” (Diamond 465) people often harbour against those who are essentially different from them. Those who come across as different are exploited, oppressed, and conveniently

“othered”. These prejudices are often expressed through the language and codes used. In *Aamis* when the truth about Nirmali is eventually divulged what results is a terrible hullabaloo. The media decides to address her as the "female cannibal." It is not viewed as another way of life but rather as an aberration, more so for stepping into the domain of the forbidden.

Several thinkers at different times have deliberated on the idea of cannibalism. Laurence R. Goldman in “From Pot to Polemic: Uses and Abuses of Cannibalism” evokes Montaigne and his works on cannibals (Goldman 1). Cannibalism is largely connected to aspects of the ‘other’ and the ‘exotic’ (Goldman 1). Jennifer Brown in her seminal work *Cannibalism in Literature and Film* delineates on tropes of cannibalism in popular culture and charts its representation in films and fictional accounts. Fear of the unknown and unknowable is intrinsically related to the practice of cannibalism. The word “cannibal” is often regarded as the antithesis of culture and civilization. Brown mentions that

Cannibalism has long been the epitome of the transgression of boundaries. It has been posited as a basic truth of historical anthropology that cannibalism was widely practiced in pre-historic times, and lingered as a norm in many tribes and cultures “untouched” by the civilizing process. (Brown 4-5)

Very many films across the globe have portrayed the theme of cannibalism from different perspectives. Some films that deftly feature this topic include *Soylent Green* (1973), *In The Realm of the Senses* (1976), *The Cook, the Thief, his Wife and Her Lover* (1989), *The Road* (2009), *Raw* (2016), and *Some Like It Rare* (2021). Cannibalism as a theme is treated differently in each of these films. However what comes across as striking is the monstrous portrayal of the trope. Another film which came out in 1971 is the Brazilian movie named *How Tasty Was My Little Frenchman* which deals with ritualistic cannibalism. Jennifer Brown talks about the figure of the cannibal and its projection in popular culture, drawing connections to the fears associated with an unknowable other (Brown 215). In *Aamis* the graphic description of eating the flesh of one’s lover has cannibalistic intent. Cannibalism has a close association with

carnality, philistinism, primitive impulses and savagery. In terms of food and power, colonial reflections situate cannibalism in the binary of the civilized and the monstrous other. By the end of the film Nirmali and Sumon are victimized by the potent domineering power of the society, conveniently labeling them as the potentially erring “other.”

From Columbus' documentation of cannibalism during the 1400's to its normative practice among some communities, cannibalism cannot be seen as a singular trope. With a rather tainted history, the taboo and monstrosity associated with it is a part of the discourse. The aspects of fascination, nourishment and horror are closely connected to the practice of eating different food, and human flesh in particular. Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* talks of food categories that “disturb identity, system, order...They do not respect borders, positions and rules” (Kristeva 4). Kristeva’s theory of ‘abjection’ promulgated in the work, draws a connection with food encounters that entail aspects of disgust, abhorrence and aberration. Human flesh as food is evidently a horrifying and a multifaceted issue. Such a practice has a propensity to fall under the purview of abjection. The choices that Nirmali and Sumon make in the film increasingly cast them as the abject.

The act of eating is an integral part of human existence and nourishment. What is edible and what is not is deeply associated with cultural ethos and societal norms. Conditioning and the internalization of cultural codes are often considered plausible reasons for the prevalence of beliefs regarding what can be eaten and what needs to be shunned. As a cinematic projection *Aamis* does not represent a collective normative requirement of food but rather a protean aspect of it, verging on the strange, becoming almost uncanny. The notions of acceptability constantly keep shifting from that which is appropriate and that which is not. It immediately questions the stable grounds of acceptable public behaviour and stirs the latent fears, eventually resulting in disruption of accepted beliefs. Cannibalism as a ploy is adopted to critically glance at various aspects of the society and the dynamics power play. Markers of social differences and food

preferences are interconnected and rather implicit in almost every society. In that sense cannibalism can be seen as an aberration and as depravity and those practicing it as loathsome. Nevertheless, by giving meaning and space to the so called “cannibal” and the possibility of sustenance of a love that is socially forbidden *Aamis* allows a shift in perspective and thwarts the apparent hegemonic societal constructions.

It is to be noted yet again that cannibalism and the practice of eating human flesh by humans is not uncommon or something which is unheard of. Cannibalism has its existence in human history amongst different communities. However, people often tend to become indifferent to the alternate ways of living and life practices; or consider cannibalism as a legitimate cultural practice. The metafictional trope of the narrative thus reflects society’s aversion towards that which is different or that which does not fall within the purview of acceptability. Diversity in meat eating practices is accentuated through the film, especially through the discourses that Sumon propounds. A proponent and advocate of inclusivity when it comes to meat eating choices, Sumon justifies the fact the one man’s food can be another man’s poison and vice versa. The surrealistic portrayal of eating the flesh of one's lover and the addiction to it does come across as rudimentary and grotesque. Notwithstanding, the tropes of cannibalism deployed in the narrative desist from valorizing the disgust. These tropes can thus, be seen as vehicles for expressing forbidden love and transgression.

Forbidden Love and Transgression

The concept of love in *Aamis* is juxtaposed with notions of the forbidden. Eagleton notes that the fulfillment of a love relation requires that “each partner acts as a kind of opening to an unfathomable otherness of the other” (Eagleton 266). The act of eating meat together by Nirmali and Sumon through their clandestine sojourns characterizes the “spontaneous-creative life” (279). Love blossoms between Nirmali, a married woman, and the young Sumon through

these meetings. These encounters also give them an opportunity to find and unravel different aspects about their own selves. Choosing a way of life different than the norm irrevocably pushes them to become figures epitomizing dissension. The moment Nirmali consumes the forbidden meat for the first time she plunges into a state of ecstasy and euphoria. This is exquisitely expressed through images of the liberated self, liberated from the manacles of domesticity and the mundane. As their relationship progresses through text messages and clandestine meetings, what ensues is a gradual transition towards deep attachment. Concocting different food combinations Sumon feeds Nirmali with utmost love. Nirmali enjoys Sumon's company. As she partakes of the meat delicacies chosen by Sumon what follows are moments of great epiphany. There is a constant calm that characterizes their meetings with a subtle unraveling of an impending surge of emotions. Nirmali seems to be more alive and accepts that she likes eating meat in Sumon's company. Sumon refuses to believe that what he shares with Nirmali is an illicit affair. He addresses her as "baideu", a term of endearment in Assamese used mostly for a sister-like figure, who is older. However, these appellations cease to matter as they move along their meat eating journey. Nirmali confesses that she feels like she has experienced the most fundamental taste of life; consumed by the lure of the meat of her lover, she starts craving more. Nirmali's hunger for the meat increasingly becomes an addiction, verging on madness. Sumon assures her that he had started it and he would rightfully end it. This turns further into a macabre depiction of Sumon and Nirmali's quest for human flesh. The gory depiction of the hunt for human flesh intensifies the madness associated with meat.

Nirmali's intense desire for human flesh turns her into a monstrous being, the proverbial "other". Sumon and Nirmali increasingly become oblivious to the powers and control of the state. There is complete disregard for and indifference towards the norms of the society. They are eventually able to shirk their fear of society and instantly attain the liberty to express the love they truly harbour for each other. In the final scene, for the first time she touches Sumon,

in public with faces clad in cloth. As if it did not matter who they are now, almost indifferent to the world around them, they stand as lovers hand in hand, epitomizing transgression and felony. Markers of identity, name, social standing - everything dissolves as “eating human flesh always erases any other possible ethnic or national identification” (Barker, Hulme, and Iversen 22). Both are doubly victimized for practicing cannibalism and transgressing the sanctity of the monogamous man/woman relationship norms of society. The film through the surrealistic portrayal of meat eating practice subverts notions of normalcy and the forbidden. Nirmali’s “abject” meat choices and Sumon’s comradeship in this journey towards tasting the forbidden liberate them from the clutches of societal norms. The complexities of desire and disgust dissolve and become immaterial for them. What remains is their incandescent love for each other, beyond their names, norms and being.

Nirmali and Sumon eventually adorn the status of being the “other,” an outcast. They create this identity by preserving the self and accepting themselves as being different from the rest. They relinquish subservience and defy the dictates of the society. Maggie Kilgour writes that such subjects “overcome duality and creates [themselves] as a unified being by knowing...others as separate objects” (Kilgour 167). Emerging as transgressors these “othered” subjects at once among the xenophobic society establish a counter narrative trope. The resistance to the forbidden and the strategic approach to maintain boundaries is reflected in ways through which Nirmali’s transgression is treated by the society at large. From the viewpoints put forth by Levi-Strauss in “The Culinary Triangle” on food cultures it can be seen that food choices often determine the definition of the individual within a society. Based on that, people can be viewed as “primitive” and “developed” (Levi-Strauss 38). The “other”, a social pariah, is someone who represents the “primitive”, personified by Sumon. Throughout the narrative he is portrayed as someone who is potentially the “other.” It is in communion with Sumon that Nirmali realizes the transgressive force within her, ultimately becoming an outcast.

Sumon is constantly rebuked by his friend for his relationship with Nirmali. Sumon's friend detests the loathsome idea of his cutting his own flesh as a token of his love for Nirmali. Sumon knows in his heart that the terrain he is trying to venture upon is a forbidden domain. Nevertheless, he goes ahead with it, compelled by his ever growing affection towards Nirmali. Nirmali is increasingly lured into the abject, forbidden terrain. There is not much introspective deliberation--the two simply dissolve into the rhythms of deep, surreal experience of passion. The two transcend into maddening lure of passion, beyond corporeality as depicted through the cinematic projection of art and music.

Meat becomes a mode of expressing liminality, along with the awareness of the body politic. At the threshold of the brutal reality Nirmali and Sumon come face to face with their fears. The eventual revelation liberates the two, detaching them from the manacles of the societal norms. The term "liminality" comes from a Latin word, which refers to a threshold; in some ways it could denote the "beginning of a process, or the sense of an ending...the gate or barrier between two separate fields or spheres" (Gadoin&Ramel, 5). The trope marks a point of transition and transgression. Nirmali, despite being in the state of 'unfinalizability,' attempts to assert agency by emerging out into the public domain with complete acceptance of her being. Both now are the outcasts, beyond the threshold of so-called civilized society.

Nirmali and Sumon effectively fit into Agamben's idea of a "Homo Sacer" figure (Agamben 47-48). Like the "Homo Sacer" they stand as ousted dissenting figures; they lose all grounds for respectability yet cannot completely be contained by the state. The grotesque body of the erring subject in a profound state of liminality remains under the law yet beyond it. Eventually both refuse to completely internalize the value system of their society, proving that although actions can be controlled, the mind cannot be in complete conformity with the imposition of a normative belief system. Nirmali and Sumon's reality creates a furore, sending shock waves across the city. Their relationship defies traditional logic, a reality that exists

beyond the banal understanding of food, love and life. The narrative however does not provide any detail pertaining to the consequent fate of the two within the confines of the society. The trajectory that lay ahead of them, and their eventual treatment at the hands of the state, thus remain unresolved and unanswered. Despite everything, they stand above the law asserting their newfound freedom and agency. Only in the final scene, for the first time they touch each other, with people and the media all around.

Aamis documents the story of Nirmali and Sumon and the events encircling their gastronomical journey. They create a carnivalesque world for themselves where meat becomes a medium of expressing their unprofessed desire and liminality. Sumon makes Nirmali taste his own flesh, camouflaging it as an exotic meat. The increased ravening within Nirmali for human flesh makes her the monstrous “other.” Nirmali thus undergoes a process of “unfinalizability” revealing a side to herself that she had never known. The narrative deploys tropes of cannibalism to portray the heterogeneity of human life. In spite of the social censure the two eventually assert agency and derive empowerment through the choices that they make. As Nirmali and Sumon stand tall, out in the public with faces covered by cloth, all markers of identity become ineffectual. Oblivious to the world around them, they stand hand in hand, as lovers who had tasted that which is forbidden.

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