

The Slice of Meat: Representation of Self and Postcolonial Feminine Identity in *Aamis* and *Raan*

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Abstract

This paper intends to analyse 'meat' as a metaphor that constructs the self and postcolonial feminine identity in Bhaskar Hazarika's *Aamis* (2019) and Rakesh Sharma's short-film *Raan* (2024). The representation of 'meat' in these films not only serves to voice the empowered self but also contests the socio-cultural hegemonic fabrics. The notion of meat and meat-eating as masculine trait is called for an interrogation. Drawing on postcolonial feminist theory and food studies, it is argued that both the films transform meat into an expansive medium where female desire is negotiated. *Aamis* (2019) navigates through self-realization and resistance to moral codification. It reaches the point of asserting cannibalism as an act of realizing the self and identity. *Raan* (2024), on the other hand, draws upon a survival strategy against patriarchal power structures. Despite their differences in tone and temperament, both the films, unmask the complex ways in which women regain agency through acts of consumption, concealment and culinary subversion.

Keywords: *self, representation of food, postcolonial feminine identity*

Introduction

In every culture and across ages, food symbolisms and metaphors abound the arena of art and literature. The essence for sustenance, food, has far greater ramification than being only a source of nutrition for the body. Its innate ability to appeal to the senses, gives its symbolic value of

shaping or expressing a culture, identity and power structure. Even, the way it is procured, cooked, served and ingested converses a lot about the gender, sexuality and agency associated in the process. The representation of food in a discourse draws much interdisciplinary scholarly attention as it speaks volumes about the history, geography, culture, identity, agency, sexuality and psychology of the society and characters involved. As Andrievskikh (2014) points, “in literary and popular contexts, appetite often stands for sexual desire, descriptions of eating mask language of possession, and representations of cooking express both enslavement and empowerment (4)”. On this note, this paper intends to analyse ‘meat’ as a metaphor to construct the self and postcolonial feminine identity in two Indian films, *Aamis* (2019) and *Raan* (2024). The representation of ‘meat’ in these films not only serves to voice the empowered self but also contests the socio-cultural hegemonic fabrics. The notion of meat and meat-eating as masculine calls for an interrogation.

There are enough studies to sustain the notion that meat eating is a masculine trait (Rozin et al., 2012). Meat is associated with supremacy, social status and masculine identity. It is popularly believed that meat provides aggressiveness, authority, strength and virility (Adams, 2015; Love and Sulikowski, 2018) and thus acts as a source of construction of masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). That said, this paper, fabricates nuances on how meat, its cooking and eating can symbolize not just the construction of masculine identity but also can act as a trope to build postcolonial feminine identity in films like *Aamis* and *Raan*.

Construction of Self and Postcolonial Feminine Identity

This paper draws on Julia Kristeva’s concept of abjection, articulated in *Powers of Horror*, as a key theoretical lens for interpreting cinematic representations of flesh and consumption. For Kristeva, the abject is “what disturbs identity, system, order” (4); in scenes involving blood, decay, or bodily ingestion, boundaries between self and other collapse. This framework illuminates *Aamis*’s cannibalistic intimacy, where eating the human body becomes an eroticized refusal of moral and social constraint.

Postcolonial feminist theory provides a necessary political dimension to this reading. Gayatri Spivak’s foundational essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” challenges Western epistemologies that silence subaltern women, whose agency is often co-opted by colonial or patriarchal systems of

representation (Spivak 271). Chandra Talpade Mohanty likewise critiques the homogenization of “Third World women” in global feminist discourse (Mohanty 72). Both theorists demand that we read subaltern femininity as contextually produced rather than universally typified.

Considering the theoretical propositions, both the Indian films are scrutinized here to see how they represent the tension between the established socio-cultural specificity and formation of postcolonial feminine identity. Such tension is built through the metaphor of “meat.” In both the films, meat is used as an instrument for self-assertion or even liberation, thereby, establishing the postcolonial feminine self of resistance and emancipation. Craving and relishing meat as a woman (*Aamis*) and killing her abusive meat-loving husband with a blow using a whole mutton leg as weapon (*Raan*) provides alternative narratives where meat-eating as a masculine trait is contested and requires a reanalysis. Also, towards the end of both the films, the act of cooking meat almost salvages the female protagonists from their past experiences of either loneliness (*Aamis*) or abuse and domestic violence (*Raan*) which they face in the familial setup. Meat, here acts as a scepter which frees them from the depressive/oppressive past and crowns them with the much-needed emancipation in the present. Meat, thereby helps in transporting the agency from masculine hegemony and pave a path for feminine empowerment.

Representation of Meat and Feminine Self in *Aamis*

Aamis chronicles an all-consuming love story between a pediatrician, Nirmali and Suman, a research scholar. Their relationship emerges beyond marriage, thus socio-culturally not acceptable. The forbidden nature of their relationship contributes to the complexity of the plot that is built around the extent to which each character has gone to control their insatiable desire and finally succumbs to its consummation. Nirmali is contemptuous towards illicit relationships and observes strictly to the societal paradigm of a ‘married woman’ even though her husband is mostly absent. Suman, a non-conformist, carries research on the meat-eating traditions of the Northeast. Suman’s association with a ‘meat club,’ in which they hunt, kill, cook and eat the meat of wild animals and birds, helps bring Nirmali to his affiliation. As their relationship mellows, Suman identifies a strong sexual desire for Nirmali. On the other hand, Nirmali’s powerful sense of morality leads her to repress her own desire for Suman. Their mutual desire meets when they started feeding each other’s flesh, i.e., meat. Here, meat serves to convey love,

sexuality, and self-assertion. Nirmali's internalized social parameters prohibit her from embracing her newfound love. But she rebels against societal norms surrounding food which to her is less threatening. Her indulgence in forbidden meat, which resembles the "forbidden fruit" in its socio-cultural ramifications, is a means to satisfy her craving for Sumon. Consumption of forbidden meat implies Nirmali's assertion of emancipation in terms of individuality and sexuality.

Meat and Feminine Self in *Raan*

Raan, another kitchen and food narrative, unveils subjugation of women and a site for their emancipation. Kitchen is projected as a room for subjugation, particularly subjugation of women. The female lead of the film, Swati is forced to kitchen chores, despite of her pregnancy. She had to cook delicious meat for her husband who is obsessed with eating meat. Her husband, Mukunda's craving for meat can be seen as establishing power and masculinity. He claims his dominance over his wife through physical and emotional abuse. Swati, on the other hand, asserts herself through sexual resistance and cooking. She tries to resist any physical intimacy with her husband by using pregnancy as an escape to drown the abhorrence which she has towards her husband. She entertains her husband's crave for meat as a food but resists his physical needs, also because she wants to protect her unborn child from his abusive manners. Mukund easily finds another woman and not only brings her home but also orders Swati to serve them liquor and chicken. He wanted to show off his masculinity and dominance over Swati and wanted to deliberately burden her with emotional torture to satiate his male ego. That was the last straw for Swati's calm and composed demeanor to break the boundary of tolerance. The next day, when he orders her to cook an elaborate dish of *raan* to entertain his friends she protests it as she has to fill doctor's appointment. Mukunda, still adamant to protect his male ego and establish power over Swati didn't soften to her difficulties, rather he orders in a menacing voice. Like every time she silently yielded to Mukund's demands and calmly got a whole leg of mutton to cook. But this time the voices within her were raging a storm inside her and her rage was on the brink of bursting. She hears the doorbell ring and her husband ordering her to open the door quickly. In a moment of rage she dashes his head with the same mutton leg when he breaks inside the house and attempted to abuse her again. What she did with the body is not shown but no one found the

body. She calmly cooked meat and served it to Mukunda's friends as was planned. Here meat serves as a tool to kill her husband, gateway to emancipation. Meat that puts her under subjugation becomes an instrument for her liberation, for manifestation of her postcolonial self.

Feminine Identity, Silence, and the Ethics of Representation

Postcolonial feminism compels us to ask how these acts of consumption are represented and who interprets them. Spivak's critique remains urgent: Western or metropolitan critics risk fetishizing the subaltern woman's transgression as exotic spectacle. The same festival circuits that celebrated *Aamis* for its "boldness" may inadvertently reproduce colonial patterns of gaze—consuming the subaltern's deviance as art (Spivak 283). To read these films responsibly, we must locate them within local histories of gender, caste, and cuisine rather than global appetites for the taboo.

Both *Aamis* and *Raan* invite ethical discomfort. Their protagonists commit morally indefensible acts, yet the films insist on understanding rather than judgment. By situating feminine agency within the abject (blood, meat, death), they force the viewer to confront complicity—the comfort derived from watching women punished or sensationalized. In this sense, both films are less about what women do than about what we, as spectators, consume.

Conclusion

The paper analyses 'meat' as a metaphor to construct the self and postcolonial feminine identity in *Aamis* (2019) and *Raan* (2024). The representation of 'meat' in these films not only serves to voice the empowered self but also contests the socio-cultural hegemonic fabrics. In *Aamis* cooking meat for a loved one is seen as an emancipatory/ liberating process resisting against the established societal norms. It gives the protagonists power and autonomy. Cooking pieces of oneself and aesthetically presenting it in a platter shows love, devotion, sexual fulfilment, resistance and self-assertion. In *Raan*, however, cooking is shown as a duty leading to subjugation, imprisonment and slavery. Killing the reason of subjugation in the place of subjugation with the thing of subjugation (meat) is like salvaging oneself from the past

experiences and moving beyond the hegemonic boundaries. There by, in both the films meat acts as a tool for Nirmali and Swati to find their own true liberated feminine selves.

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