

**Literariness Journal**

A Peer-Reviewed Quarterly  
Journal of Literature and Cultural  
Studies

P-ISSN: 3108-1614  
E-ISSN: 3108-172X

LiterarinessJournal.org

**Vol. 1, Issue. 3 June 2026**

© 2026 by the author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.



**A Literariness.org Project**

**The Uncanny Nexus: Food, Cooking and Memory in  
Amitav Ghosh's *Ghost Eye***

**DR LISA JOHN MUNDACKAL**

Associate Professor

PG and Research Department of English  
Vimala College (Autonomous), Thrissur

Affiliated to the University of Calicut

Email: [lisajmundackal@gmail.com](mailto:lisajmundackal@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** In Amitav Ghosh's *Ghost-Eye*, the acts of cooking and consumption function as mnemonic triggers that destabilise linear temporality, enabling the past to intrude upon and remould the present. The temporal disruption produces an uncanny effect, wherein the familiar that is embodied in the quotidian culinary practices becomes estranged, revealing suppressed narratives of displacement, colonial encounter, environmental changes and more. The sensorial immediacy of taste and smell further intensifies the process, thereby forging visceral connections between body, memory and landscape. This paper examines the intricate interrelationship between gustatory experience, culinary practice, and memory in Amitav Ghosh's novel, foregrounding how these elements converge to produce an uncanny narrative terrain. Situating the text within the interdisciplinary frameworks of memory studies, food studies, eco-criticism, and posthumanist discourse, the study argues that both food and cooking function as epistemic and affective mediums through which submerged histories and alternative ontologies are retrieved and reanimated. It explores how the novel reconfigures food as a site of relationality, and in the confluence of human and non-human histories, it challenges anthropocentric modes of understanding, by foregrounding the agency of non-human elements in shaping human identity and cultural memory. This study positions food and cooking as central narrative devices that mediate the uncanny, offering new insights into the intersections of memory, ecology, and identity in contemporary Indian fiction.

**Keywords:** *Food, Uncanny, Memory, Culinary, Ecology, Indian Writing in English*

The history of the art of memory has always been accompanied by radical criticism in Western culture owing to how memory rarely conformed to accepted standards of reason and empiricism. As far back in the 17th century, theologian Sir Thomas Browne dismissed any traces of even the faintest possibility of an alliance between tradition, knowledge, and memory when he wrote “Knowledge is made by oblivion, and to purchase a clear and warrantable body of Truth, we must forget and part with much we know” (Assmann 2). Though Renaissance brought a revival of the art of memory, it was not without criticism. Miguel de Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* stands like a typical manifesto for “the basic dissociation of mind and memory”, as conventionalised in those times. With the rise of modernity, there was a continued and constant devaluation of all forms of memory in the name of reason, nature, life, originality, individuality, innovation, progress, and whatever other gods they may worship. (2-3)

Amitav Ghosh’s novel *Ghost-Eye* taps on experiences that are conventionally made to stand outside the bounds of rational epistemes. With a narrative arc that traverses a span of about half a century temporally, and oscillates between Bengal and Brooklyn spatially, it has a myriad of elements ranging from fish to phantoms. When fish and its preparation give the novel a perfect realist footing, the spirits, lores and legends of the land render it an otherworldly scaffold. *Ghost-Eye* is a confluence of the spiritual and physical realms of reality where the certainty of the rational and the empirical is confronted and challenged by the dubious and the uncanny other. By straddling the uncanny with the quotidian, Ghosh appears to offer the readers the possibility of alternative ways of viewing the world. As probably the third in what now appears to be his Sundarbans trilogy, Ghosh evokes in readers, the element of terror and fear of what is probably not visible to us in a materialist perspective, and sharpens their attentiveness to what he projects as the cataclysmic dimensions of the planet. The alternative, uncanny terrain that Ghosh presents, is one that busts the existing patterns of understanding the world, and offers one where human is decentred, only to respect all and everything on the planet as animate and living. The narrative opens up the option of dismantling the anthropocentric hierarchizing of humans above the non-human species and forces.

Ghosh through his novel continues his efforts to build an environmental consciousness in the readers, and this he achieves by weaving together the pragmatic and the poetic. He says, “This is not at all, a fantastical story. It is very much grounded, but I think that is the real challenge, isn’t it? To reintroduce these mysteries into the normalcy of the life that we lead” (Dey 2). His environmentalism is less theoretical or rational and more connected with and rooted on the planet. It is his plea to the empirical world to pause and lend ears to memory, the biggest archive of life experiences. He helps reimagine this archive of memory, destabilises the understanding of ecology and reconfigures the

boundaries of reason and reality. The narrative addresses issues of cultural amnesia, ecological crises, conflicted boundaries, mass migrations, extinctions and more.

Communication between eras and generations is broken when a particular store of common knowledge disappears. As Pierre Nora puts it, whatever we now regard as memory is in “its final consumption in the flames of history” (Assmann 4). This echoes Nietzsche’s assessment of historical scholarship as a catastrophic force that erodes the sources of living memory and collective identity. *Ghost-Eye* is Ghosh’s efforts to drive home the point that memory in itself is pointless if the ultimate fate of it is as an archive. Ghosh draws upon the past and memory to shape the present and inflect the future. He articulates his belief in a living, embodied memory. He redefines the archive as an interface that contains new mixed realities.

In *Ghost-Eye*, memory itself behaves like an archive. It emerges to be more than just a place in which documents from the past are preserved. It behaves like a place where the past is constructed and produced. Outside the archive, “waste” accumulates. Waste as a “negative store” however does not stand only for disposal, destruction, and oblivion; it also stands for latent memory, which takes its place between functional and storage memory and lives on from one generation to the next in a no-man’s land between presence and absence. In this sense, the seemingly insignificant discards become what is called a semiophor — a visible sign of something invisible and ungraspable, like the past, or a person’s identity (Assmann 13).

By employing a framework of speculative realism, Ghosh problematizes memory through rebirth or reincarnation. As Historian Reinhart Koselleck writes: “The embodied experience of the survivor’s present past gives way to a pure past which is disconnected from sensuous experience” (Assmann 4). In *Ghost-Eye*, the body remembers. This embodied memory speaks more than the archived history. The narrative becomes an archive holding multiple memories. The novel becomes Ghosh’s stratagem to restrict the painful transition of sensory memory to disembodied historical memory, and the consequent waning of it, remaining only as sources of information in the form of written records, pictures or memoirs. Koselleck describes the change from the still present to the pure past as the irreversible replacement of living historical experience by scholarly historical research.

Ghosh’s narrative seems to validate new forms of memory that open up an access to the past that is distinct from and complementary to that which is provided by historical scholarship. He presents memory as a “major idiom in the construction of identity, both individual and collective, and a site of struggle as well as identification” (Antze and Lambek 7). He invokes memory to heal, to blame, to legitimate. Ghosh’s memory paradigm proclaims the distinction between storing and remembering. As Aleida Assmann observes, it “goes together with the distinction between memory as art and memory as

power; and this entails two largely independent traditions of discourse; the familiar one of rhetorical mnemotechnics and the less known psychological one that identifies memory as one of three mental faculties also known as internal senses (9). The former tradition aims “to give an orderly Gestalt to knowledge, while the latter is concerned with interaction between memory, imagination, and common sense” (9). *Ghost-Eye* offers the possibility of treating the body too as a personal medium insofar as the psychic and mental processes of remembering are not only neurological but also somatic. The body stabilizes memories through habituation, and reinforces them through the power of affect.

The narrative strand that began in *The Hungry Tide* spilled over into *Gun Island* and now has extended into *Ghost-Eye*. Apart from the spatial traversal that marks the characters’ lives in the first and second novels, *Ghost Eye* delineates a temporal travel as well. The novel juxtaposes past and present, placed five decades apart. It begins in the Calcutta of the 1960s, spiced by morchas, gheraos, protests, load shedding, Naxalbari and more. Varsha, the five years old daughter of Abhay Gupta, the younger son of the Marwari business tycoon in Calcutta, H.H. Gupta, suddenly stirs up a storm when she clamours for fish, a total taboo in the strictly vegetarian Gupta household. She shouts, “I want rice and fish. Give me some fish...Ami machh-bhat khabo. Machh dao...I want fish now! I don’t want rotis and dal...I won’t eat anything at all until you give me some rice and fish” (4-5). Her eyes seethe with anger, like that of an adult’s.

Varsha appears to access memories of a previous life through inexplicable culinary preferences and embodied sensory responses. The narrative’s central motif therefore positions food not merely as a cultural marker but as a mnemonic catalyst that disrupts linear temporality. The act of cooking, moreover, acquires a performative and ritualistic dimension, wherein the preparation of food becomes an unconscious reenactment of past-life memory. This dual emphasis on consumption and preparation foregrounds what may be conceptualized as a ‘culinary uncanny’, wherein the familiar domestic act of cooking is estranged, becoming a site for the return of repressed personal, cultural, and ecological pasts.

Drawing upon Freud’s theorization of the uncanny alongside contemporary scholarship in food and sensory studies, this paper contends that Ghosh reconfigures culinary practices as sites of embodied knowledge that exceed rationalist interpretation. The recurring presence of fish, embedded within specific regional and ecological contexts, emerges as a symbolic nexus linking identity, environment, and memory. Through both the craving for and the preparation of such food, the narrative articulates a form of interspecies and intertemporal connectivity that unsettles anthropocentric frameworks.

The interplay between food, cooking, and memory in the novel, destabilizes dominant binaries such as science and superstition, material and immaterial, and present and past. The kitchen, in this reading, becomes a liminal space where sensory experience mediates between the empirical and the spectral. In extending Ghosh's engagement with ecological precarity and cultural memory, *Ghost-Eye* proposes an alternative epistemology grounded in affect, embodiment, and the quotidian practices of cooking and eating.

Varsha in the novel behaves incomprehensibly strange and even boisterously disowns her own mother. She screams, "This is not my mother. My real mother's name is Jhorna. She doesn't live here. Our home is beside a river" (6) much to the dismay of her mother Dipika. Varsha is identified as a "case of the reincarnation type" (73) by Dr Shoma, the psychologist therapist. Shoma, the aunt of the novel's narrator, Dinu, even identifies the possibility of the birthmarks on Varsha's ribcage as an instance of the phenomenon of haemangiomas. Varsha is identified as a precocious child with the ability to express her memory of an earlier life. For Varsha, language too is a memory. She revokes and uses rustic Bangla dialect when she speaks of her past riverine life and plays "jaal khela" (49) where she skilfully knotted twine like it was a fishing net. She disrupts the affluent Gupta family's fanatically rigid vegetarian fabric with her obstinate demand for fish. Her demand causes a cultural friction that acts as a narrative rupture. Varsha's demand is not a mere dietary whim but a true catalyst for a deeper psychological and spectral investigation. Shoma says, "Cravings for certain kinds of food are quite common where there are past-life memories. There are several recorded cases of children demanding to eat something that their families didn't or couldn't eat. In India it usually happens when the child remembers an earlier life when they were born into a caste or community that was different from that of their current birth-families" (55). With her home cook Husna, a Bengali Muslim refugee woman, a victim of violent displacement from her home, south of Calcutta, whose exemplary culinary skills and "limitless knowledge of seasonal varieties of fish and vegetables" (60) prove to be of immense help, Shoma plans a test that "would be framed not with words but with food, so each item would have to be chosen with an eye to exploring a different facet of Varsha's received memories" (126). Husna's experiential knowledge comes in to aid Shoma more than her own conscious ichthyological immersal.

This haptic system of memory where tactile and sensory impressions are carried across lifetimes, becomes a crucial point of enquiry into how the novel challenges the boundaries between science and belief. For Shoma,

The truth was that the meal she was planning was neither a game, nor an experiment, nor a lab test. Serving fish to a child who had never eaten any was potentially hazardous since the varieties of fish that Bengalis preferred to eat were mainly freshwater or

estuarine species with complicated skeletal structures: many of them were filled with tiny spines that could skewer your tongue or your cheek, or worse still, your gullet. It took many years to learn how to eat those fish without coming to harm. And even experienced fish-eaters had been known to choke on bones, which was why, as a rule, small children were never served whole pieces of fish: their parents or caregivers generally picked through the flesh to make sure that it did not contain hidden hazards (126).

She, in fact, prepares this as one crucial element of the test. If Varsha declined her offer to pick the fish flesh and chose to use her own fingers for the same, it would certainly reveal her familiarity with the anatomy of different fish types. Shoma makes Husna prepare four different varieties of fish, each in a different way- one fried, one doi-machh, and tel koyi made with two different kinds of fish. Besides, she also particularly includes the rustic dudheswar variety of rice, a variety that country folk in Bengal has a particular liking to, in the meal. At the end of the contrived game of identification, Shoma is amazed to know that Varsha's sensory memories are far sharper and fine-tuned than all that she expected. She is surprised beyond bounds to know that Varsha's knowledge of fish and its varieties go beyond that of even a seasoned ichthyologist's. When cautioned to be careful while eating the fish and to ensure there aren't any bones in them, Varsha replies, "I don't understand. These pieces are from the fleshy part of a rui-machh, aren't they? There won't be any bones in them...You may not know the difference between rui and catla. But I do" (132). It was all too evident from the dexterous movements of her fingers while eating fish, that Varsha's knowledge of fish's anatomy "was embedded not just in her eyes but in her very sinews" (133). Varsha was recalling the sensory experience of eating fish in her past life.

Beneath its garb of ordinariness, food enshrouds history- both personal and social; individual and collective. At the individual level, one's memories of food can become powerful indicators that structure one's identity, while at a collective level, food memories shape the shared values of a family, or a community as a whole, thereby evolving into a broader food narrative that yokes different people across time and space. Forrest writes:

Food is the nexus of the sensing self and the sensible society, the meeting point of the individual and the communal. Through the experience of tasting, smelling, touching, seeing, and even hearing food, the individual encounters food and becomes a part of the society. Paying attention to food from the perspective of the senses allows us to place individual experience within cultural and social context, and to examine how social and cultural context shapes individual sensory experience (353).

The popularity of Proustian trope in literature voices the capacity of comestibles to evoke our senses and to act as stout mnemonic stimulants. The senses contrive and contribute pleasure when one consumes food. The same senses conjure up the past in the same act. “The tongue remembers the sensations of the ingested, the nose reminisces the aromas and scents, while the heart and mind register the experience in memory. Perhaps one of the most mysterious phenomena of food is not what food does in consumption, but how it lingers in memory” (Lee 1). A bite off his tea-dipped madeleines soaks Proust in a strange “exquisite pleasure”; an inexplicable kind, “with no suggestion of its origin” (42). What renders Proust this uncanny experience, is associated with a sensoriality that outlaws spatial and temporal dimensions.

In *Ghost-Eye* food becomes a bridging medium between past and present. Ghosh tries to bring in a culinary consciousness that reads food beyond its quotidian element. He sensitises the readers’ minds of the culinary uncanny. He says, “We don’t really think about the mystery that is food. When we eat, we ingest some of that mystery. I do think it’s very important to recognise this and to try to understand it as a phenomenon” (Dey 6). As the narrator’s mother says in the novel, “Food is the foundation of life itself; it’s what makes everything else possible. But someone who lives in their head, like Shoma does, can never understand that food is what connects us with reality” (Ghosh 63). Ghosh uses the mundane material reality of food and its memories to expose the spectral and the uncanny dimensions of ecology, only to blur the boundaries between the rational and the irrational; natural and unnatural. As the narrator observes, “Shoma was not at all ashamed of her culinary shortcomings...She took pride in having liberated herself from the drudgery of the kitchen- an idea that would have been incomprehensible to my mother, who never felt more free than when she was cooking” (63). It is only when Shoma indulges in Varsha’s case does she first recognise and feel how incapacitated she is, in culinary matters. Husna steps in to act as her second half, complementing Shoma’s theoretical knowledge with her own practical kind. While preparing for Varsha’s meal Shoma fusses about buying pakal-machh, only to be sensitised by Husna about the seasonal availability of fish, which makes her ashamed of her own ignorance. Husna says, “It’s just that this is not the season. Pakal is available mainly during the monsoon- that’s when farmers catch them in their fields” (165).

The guessing games conducted by Dr Shoma to investigate Varsha’s claims of her past riverine life as Isha Mondal, the daughter of Benoy Mondal and Jhorna of the Munda Adivasi tribe, in a mud house with a protima of goddess Manasadevi, in the village of Lusibari in the Sundarbans, fishing and cooking alongside her mother, becomes a thorough investigation into a deltaic biodiversity and the sustainable diets followed in those fragile terrains in the past. Each species of fish mentioned in the narrative, acts as a sensory trigger that effectively activates Varsha’s “haptic memory” (184) system. Rui, Koyi, Karvu, Darkina, Neftani typify the Bengali culinary culture and continuity. In the test, when

she is given Tilapia, an African farm species recently introduced in Bengal, Varsha falters. Dr. Shoma reports this to her father,

Varsha knew what she was eating wasn't our local koyi, but she wasn't able to identify it as tilapia. And this is itself very revealing, because it suggests that the person whose memories and tactile senses she has inherited was not familiar with the species either. This is completely consistent with what she has told us so far about her past-life memories- that she was a woman who lived in a village and cooked and caught fish. Such a person would not have recognised a recently introduced non-native fish (152).

Losing to Varsha in the test is no matter of concern for Shoma. She recognises Varsha as a “prodigy” who displays an exemplary skill to identify all the local fish types, a skill far refined than even that of her own husband Dr Monty who claims to be a fish connoisseur. As Shoma observes,

When you put food in your mouth you know what to expect because of the memories that are fed into your haptic system not just by your tongue but also by your nose and your fingertips. It seems to me that Varsha has inherited an enormous assemblage of haptic memories from her previous self...I've never heard of a case of inherited haptic memories that are as finely calibrated and as sensitive as Varsha's...Varsha has inherited all her former self's sense memories of the world (184-185).

The dual-timeline structure of *Ghost-Eye* serves to bridge the historical legacies of the 1960s with the ecological anxieties of the new millenium. After the past timeline set in Bengal of 1969, the novel's contemporary timeline transitions to Brooklyn of the covid times, where the narrator Dinu, uncovers his aunt Shoma's case files. Dinu's journey through the files leads him to a rediscovery of the missing Varsha Abhay Gupta, who had to relocate with her family away from Calcutta, owing to her father's accidental death. This journey takes the readers along, to the extraordinary and spectral experiences of “ghost eyes” () like Tipu, a native of Sundarbans who lives with heterochromia, since he was bitten by a cobra, Dev, the refugee from Burma who is taken in by Shoma and Monty and therefore grows up at Tavoy since the age of thirteen, Shoma Dinu's own aunt who is called back to life from a near-to-death situation and since then sees things ahead, and most importantly, Varsha herself, now after decades, Monsoon Abhayaputri, the Wall Street legend- who possess “precognitive intuitions” (185). As Tipu puts it, “ghost-eyes can see two worlds: One of them is the ordinary one that everyone can see. But the other one- that's just for us ghost-eyes... You gotta understand- the ghost-eye way is all 'bout what's right here, 'bout bein' from the soil” (232).

Through an orchestrated exhibition of the Sundarban pictures clicked by Abhay Gupta, on his visit to Lusibari in 1969, with Varsha, Shoma and Monty, and which comes into his possession from Shoma, Dinu meets Varsha. However, his plans of raking up her memories with her story that he has written, does not succeed, as she retorts after reading it, “I don’t believe any of it. I don’t think what you’ve written here is true. It’s just a story, and it’s not going to stop me from suing you... You would need to serve me some fish, like you say your aunt did. If I ate the fish, and my body remembered the taste, then I would know” (259). More than the written archives, what better functions for Varsha is culinary memory. Food, particularly fish, acts as her memory trigger. Dinu’s effort to recover old recipes for Varsha is an act of research that serves to reawaken memories lost to modernity and displacement. Recreating provincial tastes is challenging for Dinu, who in his childhood always hankered for the fashionable modern foods and flavours and used to be embarrassed by the “old-fashioned” (261) food that his mother served. This challenge brings forth in him a recognition of his culinary ignorance. He identifies that this gap is one which “could not be filled by cookbooks and how-to manuals” (261).

Luce Giard in her essay “Doing-Cooking” writes, “Culinary practices- people exclude it from the field of knowledge, yet it requires a multiple memory: a memory of apprenticeship, of witnessed gestures, and of consistencies” (de Certeau and Giard 156). As Heldke observes, “Genuine knowledge” (Curtin and Heldke 204) eclipsed the bunch of banal, practical activities. This hierarchisation of the mind over the body, led to an overt separation of the subject and the object, promoting disembodiment and non-invasive vision (206). There is an overt and obvious prioritisation of what is seen (even from a distance) over what is felt, smelt, tasted or touched. “Knowing” (203), therefore, disregards “doing” (203) which engages with all the bodily senses.

Cooking involves an embodied knowledge of food which calls for an intimate interconnection between the cook and the cooked, the subject and the object, the self and the dish prepared. The latter evolves out of the bodily engagement of the cook with the ingredients. Unlike other forms of enquiry, cooking is where the “subject and the object meet and touch” (206) and interact. Boundaries blur, allowing one to become the other. In cooking, the interconnectedness between the self and the other, replaces the dichotomous divide between the two, thereby qualifying it as a thoughtful practice. To quote Heldke:

By seeing ourselves as connected to the things we grow and cook- by transforming the subject/object dichotomy into a relationship which recognises the interconnections between us and those foods- we are called upon to recognise a mode of interaction that might be called “bodily knowledge”. A conception of thoughtful practices should have

as one of its foci a realisation of the embodied nature of those activities (Curtin and Heldke 218).

She continues to say that the knowledge involved in cooking is not contained” (218) in one’s head but in one’s “hands, wrists, eyes and nose as well” (218). Bodily knowledge then, is literally what is known as using the body. In her study of Japanese cooking techniques, Merry White observes, “I saw that cooks, through experience and constant trials, learned in the tongue, the nose, the fingers, and the eyes- and even in the sounds- what was desirable in food” (69). She identifies the cooks’ “bodies and the biomechanics of labour” (70) to be the most essential components in food making, followed by the skills, the artefacts and the contexts.

Recreating Husna’s dishes in Brooklyn becomes tedious for Dinu, as it demands cooking from scratch. He begins right from making his own mustard oil. As he says,

Before I knew it I was on the website of a delivery service, ordering very expensive non-GMO mustard seeds. They were delivered the next evening and I set to work at once, heating, grinding and wrapping the oil slurry in cheesecloth before squeezing with all my might...Strangely, at the end of this messy, sweaty, time-consuming procedure, I was transported back to the winter mornings of my childhood in Calcutta (Ghosh 267).

Authentic Bengali flavours also call for “a shil-nora to grind the spices, and a korai, for the frying” (267). With the help of Leo Chang, he manages to locate Mike’s Fuzanglong Fisheries and ensures a steady supply of all the fish varieties he needs. As his actual cooking begins in his apartment, the aroma of the magur-macch’r jhol he prepares, brings his friend Amanda up from the ground floor, who takes him for a seasoned cook. Dinu reverts, “No this is the first time. I’m trying to teach myself how to cook the food I ate as a child...Because I’ve been told that in order to save the world, we have to remind ourselves of the old ways” (278).

The body becomes the most agential of the cook’s tools. The literally visceral nature of food correlates with and corresponds to the corporeality of the cook’s body. A cook’s bodily knowledge which complements and completes a recipe is often something that is acquired through embodied practices and experience. A recipe, which is merely an account of instructions simply proves futile if the body fails to be attuned to and accustomed with the object, through a set of practiced interactions with it. Merry White too agrees upon this when she talks of how the Western concept of recipe is a “didactic, and precision- qualified” (67) entity with little connect or codification of the nature of the experience, observation, knowledge and skills required in cooking. Techniques “are to be practiced, repeated to become “second nature” in the body work of cooking” (67). It is best learnt through

observation, imitation, repetition and sometimes trial and error. Dinu invites his neighbour and friend from Calcutta, over to his apartment in Brooklyn, to treat him with his fish dishes. Tarun's verdict "I remember it: it's taking me back a long time- to Tavoy, when Shoma and Monty had that amazing cook...What was her name? Husna?...Gojar-machh! That's what it was and this is exactly how it tasted" (Ghosh 283), becomes a qualifier for Dinu to invite Varsha over for a home-cooked Bengali meal.

Kitchen becomes a site "in which memory, mood and agency are materialised" (Meah and Jackson 4), a space in which "objects of personal, artistic or cultural interest are stored and displayed to narrate the untold stories of lives being lived, those having been lived and those which are imagined within them" (4). It becomes an intensely personal space wherein relations with food and other objects play a vital role "in mobilising the sensory, haptic and kinetic dimensions of memory through a combination of taste-, sound- and smell-scapes and mundane activities which are embedded in the rhythms of everyday life", and constitute "the sensory dimensions of memory" (4). David Sutton opines that "it is the sensuality of food, how it crosses over- via processes of synaesthesia with different sensory registers that makes it a particularly compelling medium for memory" (Cooking Skills 301). This synesthetic exercise in fact, shapes a "non-hierarchised sensory perception" (301) that contributes to a holistic and complete culinary consciousness.

Sutton looks at memory itself as a sense, wherein he does not treat it as a separate faculty attributable to or associated with any particular bodily organ, but rather, an aspect or element of a sensory experience. He identifies "a semantic circuit that links the sensorial to agency, memory, finitude, and therefore history" (Seremetakis 4) - all of which are contained within the etymological spectrum of the senses. The senses not only represent the inner states which shy away from a very visible display of themselves on the surface. They are equally well situated within a social-material arena outside of the body, facilitating a synaesthetic experience. The senses are semantic apparatuses that function beyond consciousness and intention:

The interpretation of and through the senses becomes a recovery of truth as collective, material experience. The senses are also implicated in historical interpretation as witnesses or record-keepers of material experience...The involuntary circuit of the senses reveals that embodied performance is in part constructed out of the cross-communication of senses and things...Memory as a distinct meta-sense, transports, bridges, and crosses all the other senses (6-9).

Memory, for Sutton is that creative duct between past and present that enables the past to suffuse the present and inflect the future. Sutton uses the term "polytemporality" (Korsmeyer and

Sutton 472) to convey how “the present moment seems to hum with memories of past words and past times” (472). For Sutton, polytemporality refers to how individuals make use of their memories to call upon the past to interpret, contextualise, or simply link the present with the comfort of the known past. (Korsmeyer and Sutton 473). Holtzman too talks of the power of food in maintaining the spatial and temporal connections that facilitate both reflective memory of past events and experiences, as well as prospective memory of anticipated future rituals and celebrations. Incorporating memory as a sense opens up new vistas for understanding people's “gustemic lives” (Lee 5). Everyday domestic food preparation practices facilitate “gustemic knowing” (5) as explored and evidenced by Heldke. Through the memories of the social pasts and the combined provocation of the senses during cooking, human body proves to be a rich corpus of accumulated memories, which becomes a medium that channels energies from past to present. This is evidenced by the way Varsha engages in the cooking of the meal that Dinu prepares at his apartment, for her:

Varsha froze and began to sniff the air, her eyes closed...Her eyes flew open and stared at my kitchen. Then she slipped out of her coat, kicked off her shoes and walked straight through the room, her gaze fixed on the kitchen counter...She stood there for a while, absolutely still, then a shiver went through her and her right hand extended itself, as if of its own volition, and fell gently on the boti's wooden base...she sank to the floor and curled her leg under her in a single, graceful movement while gripping the blade of the boti with the toes of her right foot (Ghosh 293-294).

The ease, speed and confidence with which Varsha works on the boti and shil-nora speaks of the expertise and habit memory that operates in her. As Dinu observes, “it was as though with every movement of her limbs, with every aroma that she inhaled, her body was remembering what she needed to do and executing it flawlessly. All of the cooking, which would have taken me at least two hours, took her less than half that” (295). Though the relationship between memory and the senses are most obviously and commonly implicated in taste and smell, as Sutton suggests, memory is also “embodied, haptic and kinetic” (Meah and Jackson 5), as it comes along with the senses and skilled practices. What is referred to as habit memories, is described by Sutton as “a remembrance of the hands” (Bigger 89). They imply that culinary memory resides in the hands, more than heads, which stresses on the “embodied character of memory” (Meah and Jackson 5). As pointed out by Bhatti et al, “If our memories are a form of knowledge about ourselves...they are sourced by the past through our bodies in the form of interactions between haptic perception, the senses, tactile experiences, and movements” (71-72).

The food that Dinu and Varsha prepare and relish, is not merely food that satisfies their physical hunger, but each bite of it is “filled with the vitality of the earth itself” (Ghosh 295); carries the essence of the land; the flavour of the terroir. As Varsha acknowledges after the meal, “It’s all coming back to me now: Lusibari, our bhite basha with the pond behind it, the Shindaw Nat, everything. Even you and Dev” (296). Habit memory, Connerton opines, has “the capacity to reproduce a certain performance” (72). Connerton demonstrates how bodily practices, the embodied substrata of performance, key cultural memory. In cultural memory, “the past is, as it were, sedimented in the body” (72). Embodiment is not primarily textual, rather, the sentient body is culturally consumed by a world filled with forces, smells, textures, sights, sounds and tastes, all of which trigger cultural memories. As Stoller says, “it evokes the past, manipulates the present, and provokes the future” (636). He identifies a power that devolves from embodiment- a power that construes and constructs identities. As a person cooks, he/she subconsciously consults his/her own inner “gustemic voice” (Lee 5), using his/her repository of food memories. Jon D Holtzman too notes that “the sensuousness of food is central to understanding at least much of its power as a vehicle for memory” (365).

Jennifer Brady identifies five interlinked constructs which thread food memory: people and communality, food making and the body, sense and synaesthesia, emotional reveries and evocative sceneries. This, in short would mean people, embodiment, senses, emotions and sceneries. Together, the constructs form a “gustemic gestalt” (Lee 4) that intertwines and fills in missing gaps of a fragmented food-related past. The synaesthetic cooking that Sutton and Seremetakis discuss of, implying a crossing-over of the senses that entails in the memory of one sense getting stored in another, contributes to making cooking an incarnate practice, creating an embodied, culinary mnemonics. Food memories do not only comprise material and sensorial aspects of food, but also the nuanced remembrances of social surroundings, communal practices, and bodily knowledge (Lee 1).

In *Ghost-Eye*, Ghosh dismantles the notion of identity as a singular, linear progression from birth to death. He instead foregrounds the porosity of it, displaying how identity embodies multiple lives and voices. A hunger-triggered remembrance of a past life, makes Varsha become a tool to decentre the human subject as an autonomous entity. Her sensory memory breaks the rigidity of rationality, only to echo the trans-corporeal forces that converge to proclaim the mystery of being, and the agency of the non-human world. The post humanist methodology that Dr. Shoma adopts, bridges the chasm between psychiatry and paranormal, by tapping the haptic archive that leads through entangled histories rooted in the Sundarbans.

Fish, an active cultural participant in Bengali cuisine and life, directs the narrative. Food acts like a magical connector that unearths buried memories and decentres identities. A global crisis is

rooted in the sacred ordinariness of a fish curry, and the memories around it speak planetary histories. Mystery of food is the mystery of the planet. Ingesting this mystery means therefore, that we begin to live multiple lives for a collective survival. The novel destabilises the anthropocentric view of the world, and ushers in a post humanist view of reality.

#### Works Cited

- Antze, Paul, and Michael Lambek. *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory*. Routledge, 1998.
- Assmann, Aleida. *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization*. Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Brady, Jennifer. "Cooking as Inquiry: A Method to Stir up Prevailing Ways of Knowing Food, Body, and Identity." *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, vol. 10, no. 4, Dec. 2011, pp. 321–34. *SAGE Journals*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/160940691101000402>. Accessed 21 Sept. 2025.
- Bhatti, Mark, et al. "‘I Love Being in the Garden’: Enchanting Encounters in Everyday Life." *Social & Cultural Geography*, vol. 10, no. 1, Feb. 2009, pp. 61–76. *Taylor & Francis Online*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649360802553202>. Accessed 12 Feb. 2025.
- Connerton, Paul. *How Societies Remember*. Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Curtin, Deane W., and Lisa M. Heldke. *Cooking, Eating, Thinking: Transformative Philosophies of Food*. Indiana University Press, 1992.
- Dey, Sohini. "Amitav Ghosh: ‘The World Is Not Mechanical.’" 15 Dec. 2025, <https://openthemagazine.com/books/the-world-is-not-mechanical-says-amitav-ghosh>. Accessed 6 Apr. 2026.
- Forrest, Beth M., and Deirdre Murphy. "Food and the Senses." *Routledge International Handbook of Food Studies*, edited by Ken Albala, Routledge, 2014, pp. 352–63.
- Ghosh, Amitav. *Ghost-Eye: A Novel*. Fourth Estate, 2006.
- Holtzman, Jon D. "Food and Memory." *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 35, 2006, pp. 361–78. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25064929>. Accessed 18 Nov. 2019.
- Lee, Kai-Sean. "Cooking up Food Memories: A Taste of Intangible Cultural Heritage." *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, vol. 54, Mar. 2023, pp. 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2022.11.005>.

- Meah, Angela, and Peter Jackson. "Re-Imagining the Kitchen as a Site of Memory." *Social & Cultural Geography*, vol. 17, no. 4, Sept. 2015, pp. 511–32. *Taylor & Francis Online*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2015.1089587>.
- Parasecoli, Fabio. "Savoring Semiotics: Food in Intercultural Communication." *Social Semiotics*, vol. 21, no. 5, Nov. 2011, pp. 645–63. *Taylor & Francis Online*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2011.578803>. Accessed 18 Feb. 2026.
- Seremetakis, C. Nadia. *The Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity*. Edited by C. Nadia Seremetakis, Routledge, 2019. *Taylor & Francis Online*, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429314506>. Accessed 6 Mar. 2026.
- Sutton, David E. *Bigger Fish to Fry: A Theory of Cooking as Risk, with Greek Examples*. Berghahn, 2021.
- . "Cooking Skills, the Senses and Memory: The Fate of Practical Knowledge." *Food and Culture: A Reader*, edited by Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik, Routledge, 2013, pp. 299–319.
- . "Food and the Senses." *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 39, 2010, pp. 209–23. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.012809.104957>. Accessed 11 May 2025.
- Sutton, David E., and Michael Hernandez. "Voices in the Kitchen: Cooking Tools as Inalienable Possessions." *Oral History*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2007, pp. 67–76. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40179947>. Accessed 3 Jan. 2026.
- White, Merry. "Body, Tool, and Technique: Elements of Work in the Japanese Kitchen." *A Philosophy of Recipes: Making, Experiencing, and Valuing*, edited by Andrea Borghini and Patrik Engisch, Bloomsbury Academic, 2022.