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**The Body at the Table: Food, Shame, and Diasporic  
Femininity in *Fatty Fatty Boom Boom: A Memoir of Food,  
Fat, and Family***

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**Abstract:** The persistent critical neglect of fat embodiment as a serious analytical category within South Asian diasporic literary studies has rendered the fat female body visible in domestic anecdotes and familial commentary yet absent from sustained theoretical examination. Among the texts that demand such examination is Rabia Chaudry's *Fatty Fatty Boom Boom: A Memoir of Food, Fat, and Family* (2022), which traces the narrator's experiences growing up Pakistani American while navigating the intimate intersections of appetite, shame, kinship, and bodily visibility across two cultures whose relationship to the female body and to food itself proves irreconcilable. By centring the culinary as the primary site through which diasporic femininity is both constituted and disciplined, Chaudry's memoir challenges the tendency within both Fat Studies and diaspora criticism to theorise the fat South Asian female body in abstraction from the familial feeding practices, gendered surveillance, and cultural anxieties that produce it. In a contemporary moment when the fat diasporic female body remains suspended between fields that are too racialised for dominant Fat Studies and too embodied for conventional diaspora criticism, this paper reads *Fatty Fatty Boom Boom* through the combined frameworks of Elspeth Probyn's alimentary assemblages, Anita Mannur's culinary fictions, and Susan Bordo's feminist critique of bodily regulation, arguing that the memoir reveals feeding and watching as mutually constitutive rather than opposing forces, and that the fat South Asian female body, it constructs not a site of individual failure but of diasporic, gendered, and cultural production that resists resolution into either shame or celebration.

**Keywords:** *Fatty Fatty Boom Boom, Alimentary Assemblages, Diasporic Femininity, Fat Studies, Culinary Fictions, Bodily Surveillance, South Asian Diaspora, Memoir*

## Introduction

Over the past two decades, South Asian diasporic literature has turned increasingly toward the intimate textures of home, memory, and everyday life to articulate the lived realities of migration. Feminist criticism has attended to questions of gender, domestic labour, religion, and cultural belonging, while diaspora studies has remained centrally invested in displacement, hybridity, race, and nationhood. Yet within these intersecting conversations, fatness has rarely emerged as a serious theoretical category, one capable of reframing how we understand South Asian diasporic experience. The fat body appears persistently in domestic anecdotes, familial commentary, culinary rituals, and gendered expectations, yet it seldom becomes the focal point of sustained literary analysis. Consequently, the fat South Asian female body remains suspended between feminist literary criticism and diaspora studies, acknowledged by neither field in meaningful depth. What demands closer examination is how fatness operates not as a mere bodily condition but as a lived cultural phenomenon shaped by food, kinship, migration, and the intimate architectures of family life.

This critical silence becomes especially conspicuous when placed alongside the emergence of Fat Studies as a robust theoretical domain. Scholars such as Kathleen LeBesco and Charlotte Cooper have rigorously challenged medicalised and moralising frameworks by insisting that fat embodiment is socially produced rather than individually failed. LeBesco observes that fat subjects typically navigate deeply internalised forms of shame before accessing any possibility of self-recognition or resistance (121). Cooper similarly critiques celebratory body-positive narratives that flatten the ambivalence, pain, and emotional exhaustion continuing to shape fat women's lives (15). Nevertheless, Fat Studies has largely centred white Western bodies and Euro-American contexts within its theoretical architecture. At the same time, South Asian diaspora studies has foregrounded migration, hybridity, and identity formation without substantially engaging the body as a material site of negotiation. The fat South Asian woman thus falls between two fields: too racialised for dominant Fat Studies and too embodied for conventional diaspora criticism.

This study addresses that gap by bringing together three interconnected theoretical frameworks. The first and most central is Elspeth Probyn's *Carnal Appetites: FoodSexIdentities*, which provides the conceptual vocabulary for understanding food as an "alimentary assemblage" that connects the body to desire, memory, and social belonging. Probyn argues that eating has become "a matter of intensity," one that gathers "feelings, hopes, pleasures and worries" into experiences that are simultaneously personal and social (12). More significantly, she insists that the act of eating places human beings within various assemblages "through which they are produced and produce themselves anew," suggesting that the interminglings of the cultural, the culinary, and the corporeal constitute not merely

a social phenomenon but an ethical and ontological one (4). Her theorisation of shame and disgust as bodily forces that cannot simply be expelled or resolved further illuminates how the fat female subject processes cultural contempt through the very tissues of her flesh (145). Throughout this paper, Probyn's work serves as the primary lens for reading Chaudry's memoir, revealing how food organises diasporic domestic space and how shame becomes inscribed on the female body.

The second framework is Anita Mannur's *Culinary Fictions: Food in South Asian Diasporic Culture*, which grounds the analysis within the specific context of South Asian American experience. Mannur argues that food constitutes one of the most "viable and valuable sites" through which home, race, and belonging are imagined within diasporic communities (22). More crucially for this study, she insists that diasporic culinary narratives carry within them "a discomfort that palatable accounts of migration tend to flatten," and that food cannot be allowed to contain only what Sara Ahmed calls "happy effects" (271). This insistence on vigilance, on holding open the ambivalence and pain that accompany culinary belonging, provides the methodological orientation for reading Chaudry's memoir against celebratory frameworks that would resolve its tensions too easily.

The third framework is Susan Bordo's *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, which supplies the feminist critique of bodily regulation that the other two frameworks presuppose but do not fully articulate. Bordo argues that female bodies have historically been "significantly more vulnerable than male bodies to extremes of cultural manipulation," and that the social regulation of the female body constitutes "a central strategy in the maintenance of power relations between the sexes" (143). Her analysis of eating disorders as "reflections of the central pathologies of a culture that has instilled in women a profound dread of their own appetites" (140) provides the diagnostic language for understanding Chaudry's disordered relationship with food not as individual pathology but as cultural symptom. Where Probyn emphasises the affective and ontological dimensions of eating, Bordo supplies the political critique of how female hunger is disciplined and shamed.

Together, these three frameworks enable a reading of *Fatty Fatty Boom Boom: A Memoir of Food, Fat, and Family* (2022) that neither reduces fat embodiment to individual failure nor celebrates it as uncomplicated resistance. Contemporary literary scholarship on the fat female body has emphasized a generative tension between systemic surveillance and intersectional identity. Md. Hasinur Siddique, in "Docile Femininity: Repression of Fat Female Body Image in Young Adult Literature" (2021), argues that YA fiction constructs fat protagonists as docile bodies subjected to intense self-scrutiny and social policing, noting that "constant surveillance from the self and others torment bigger physical figures and thrash them as unacceptable entities" (Siddique 164). Linda T.

Parsons, in "The (Re)presentation of Fat Female Protagonists and Food Addiction in Young Adult Literature" (2016), identifies a pervasive moral model embedded in the narrative arc of such fiction, one that casts fatness as the consequence of food addiction rooted in poor coping and insufficient discipline, arguing that this framing "perpetuates the moral model of addiction implying that the protagonist is to blame" (Parsons 12). Against these models of failure and docility, Weronika Suchacka, in "'Alimentary Assemblages' at Intersections: Food, (Queer) Bodies, and Intersectionality in Marusya Bociurkiw's *Comfort Food for Breakups: The Memoir of a Hungry Girl* (2007)" (2020), deploys Elspeth Probyn's concept of alimentary assemblages to reframe food not as a marker of shame or addiction but as a vital site of ontological complexity, where eating "reactivates the force of identities" and reveals how subjects inhabit multiple, intersecting axes of existence simultaneously (Suchacka 357-359). Extending this critique to South Indian cinema, Navya P. K. and Abhilasha examine post-millennial "fat films" such as *Da Thadiya* (2012), *Inji Iduppazhagi* (2015), and *Laddu Babu* (2014), arguing that despite their claims to fat positivity, these narratives ultimately construct fatness as a liminal and alterable state rather than a legitimate form of embodiment(2). This paper advances these conversations by placing Probyn, Mannur, and Bordo in dialogue with Chaudry's memoir, demonstrating how feeding practices act as a primary love language that complicates the simple binary of repression versus recovery.

Memoir offers an especially generative form for this investigation. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson note that memory in autobiographical narrative remains inseparable from the "contexts of telling," functioning not as an isolated fact but as a "situated association" shaped by the conditions of narration itself (35). This formulation becomes particularly significant in diasporic contexts, where identity is negotiated not only through public histories of displacement but through ordinary rituals of family life, food practices, and domestic relationships. Rabia Chaudry's *Fatty Fatty Boom Boom: A Memoir of Food, Fat, and Family* (2022) traces the author's experiences growing up Pakistani American while navigating the intimate intersections of appetite, shame, kinship, religion, migration, and bodily visibility. From its opening pages, Chaudry establishes fatness not as an isolated bodily condition but as something genealogical, domestic, and culturally inherited. The narrative moves through family histories stretching across Partition, migration, and diasporic settlement, positioning food at the heart of Pakistani familial life long before the narrator herself is born. Kitchens, recipes, communal eating, hospitality, and feeding practices become central to the emotional architecture of the household. Food circulates as affection, obligation, memory, and care. Simultaneously, the memoir reveals how the female body becomes subject to scrutiny from the earliest stages of life. Chubbiness is noticed in infancy, commented upon in childhood, and gradually transformed into a marker of anxiety surrounding femininity and marriageability.

This paper will explore several interconnected questions. How does Chaudry's memoir construct the fat South Asian female body as a site of diasporic negotiation? In what ways does food oscillate between care and surveillance within familial space? And how might reading fatness through memoir complicate existing understandings of South Asian diasporic femininity and embodiment? The answers, this paper argues, lie not in resolution but in the sustained, unresolved tension between being fed and being watched.

### **The Culinary Archive and the Alimentary Assemblage**

That food constitutes one of the most foundational sites through which diasporic identity, cultural memory, and familial belonging are organised is a claim well established within culinary studies. Elspeth Probyn, in her theorisation of the relationship between eating and subjectivity, observes that food has become "a matter of intensity," a phenomenon that draws together "feelings, hopes, pleasures and worries" into experiences that are simultaneously personal and social (12). What Probyn identifies as a contemporary cultural condition is, in Rabia Chaudry's *Fatty Fatty Boom Boom: A Memoir of Food, Fat, and Family*, a structural and ancestral reality that long predates the narrator's own entrance into the world. The act of eating, as Probyn further argues, places human beings within various assemblages "through which they are produced and produce themselves anew," suggesting that the interminglings of the cultural, the culinary, and the corporeal constitute not merely a social phenomenon but an ethical and ontological one (4). This understanding is not peripheral to Chaudry's memoir but foundational to it. Before her appetite becomes a site of cultural scrutiny, before her body accumulates the social meanings that the memoir will spend considerable energy unpacking, food has already organised the emotional and spatial architecture of the household she will inherit.

The origins of this organisation are ancestral, reaching back to a time when food represented one of the most elemental conditions of human survival and when its preparation was a labour distributed along strictly gendered lines. Women cooked and men provided. What was once the sole condition of survival has since become something far more layered: a language of kinship, a mechanism of cultural transmission, and, as this memoir makes visible, a site upon which femininity itself is defined and disciplined. This layered significance finds its most concentrated expression in Chaudry's portrait of Taya Amma, her paternal grandmother, whose domestic existence is rendered with a precision that is itself analytically significant. "A special stove built into the kitchen floor serves as her throne," Chaudry writes. "A large woven footstool, mixing bowls, a wooden mortar and pestle, a chimta for turning rotis, and a sil wata for grinding meat and masalas by hand are arranged within arm's reach, so that she need never rise" (25). The inventory of objects that Chaudry provides is not incidental. Each utensil named constitutes an artefact of inherited culinary knowledge, evidence of a

mastery accumulated across years of labour and transmitted through generations of women whose authority resided, however circumscribed, in their command over the kitchen's processes and materials. The stove floor becomes a kind of sovereignty. Taya Amma presides over her domain, directs the household help, and surveys the garden through a small stone window. Yet this sovereignty is simultaneously a bounded world. The throne is also a station. The window offers only a glimpse of sky.

Anita Mannur, in situating the emergence of food studies as a critical discourse, draws attention to the ways in which food has long been theorised as reflecting and reproducing the social and cultural patterns of the communities within which it is prepared and consumed. From Levi Strauss's structural anthropology to Bourdieu's sociology of taste, from Mintz's excavation of the relationship between food, colonialism, and power to Barthes's attention to its symbolic dimensions, the critical tradition insists that culinary practice is never merely functional but is always already a form of cultural production, a site at which identity, belonging, and social relation are enacted and sustained (Mannur 24-25). Read through this framework, Taya Amma's kitchen exceeds its domestic function. It becomes a space in which Pakistani femininity, familial obligation, and diasporic cultural continuity are daily reproduced through the physical labour of the female body. The insistence upon "freshly slaughtered meat and that morning's vegetables," the categorical refusal of the refrigerator as "an affront to quality," the understanding that "leftover food belongs to whoever passes by in need" are not merely culinary preferences but assertions of a particular way of being in the world, practices that carry within them a whole cultural inheritance (Chaudry 26). The kitchen, in this sense, functions as a diasporic archive, a space in which the values, rhythms, and relational structures of a community are preserved and passed forward through the daily act of feeding.

What distinguishes Chaudry's memoir, however, is not only that it documents such practices but that it holds them in sustained critical tension. The labour of feeding, as Chaudry renders it, is not simply an expression of cultural continuity. It is also a structure that organises the female body's purpose, desire, and daily existence around the appetites of others. "Preparing and serving these three meals to the three men in the house, her husband, son, and father-in-law, was Taya Amma's singular purpose every day, whether or not she wanted it to be" (27). The subordinate clause that closes this sentence is where the memoir's critical intelligence surfaces with greatest precision. The qualifier, "whether or not she wanted it to be," does not simply introduce ambivalence into an otherwise celebratory domestic portrait. It fractures the surface of that portrait entirely, admitting into the narrative a subjectivity that possesses desires, resistances, and an interiority that the structure of the household neither acknowledges nor accommodates.

This refusal becomes further legible in the culinary rivalry that Chaudry traces between her mother and her sister-in-law, a competition conducted not through argument but entirely through the quality of a shorba, adjudicated through the approval of a patriarch's palate. "Thus began a two-year unspoken culinary rivalry," Chaudry notes, between her mother and a woman who was "decades older, decades she had spent mostly hunched over a stove" (23). When her father-in-law publicly praises her mother's cooking and summons his elder daughter-in-law to taste it, the younger woman's satisfaction is rendered as smugness, a staking of domestic claim, a proof of culinary superiority (28). The episode reveals the extent to which food operates, within the Pakistani household, as the primary currency through which women negotiate belonging, status, and affective recognition. To cook well is to be valued. To be valued is to belong. This is what Probyn, drawing on a long philosophical tradition that connects eating, loving, and thinking, identifies as the ethical dimension of alimentary practice: that the intricate ways in which eating and social existence are brought together constitute not a peripheral concern but a governing principle of how life is organised and meaning is made (5).

Avtar Brah's observation that femininity as a category assumes specific meanings in relation to "particular historical trajectories, material circumstances, and cultural experiences that are always also conditions of social existence" grounds this analysis within its explicitly diasporic dimension (102). Taya Amma's body at the kitchen floor and Chaudry's mother dispatching a triumphant bowl of shorba upstairs are not merely domestic scenes. They are diasporic texts, sites at which culture is most intimately transmitted and most quietly enforced. The stakes of the table, in *Fatty Fatty Boom Boom: A Memoir of Food, Fat, and Family* (2022), are inseparable from the stakes of femininity itself. It is here, in the space between nourishment and obligation, between cultural continuity and gendered confinement, that the memoir locates the origins of a story that will, in time, come to be written on the narrator's own body.

### **Appetite as Transgression**

That the body is a cultural text, one that is read, interpreted, and assigned meaning long before the individual who inhabits it develops the capacity for self-reflection, is a proposition central to the feminist theorisation of embodiment. Probyn, in her sustained engagement with the relationship between eating and identity, argues that "food goes into the body and, broken down, comes back out," and that every time this process occurs "the body is affected in ways that extend far beyond the merely physiological" (14). What eating confirms, she insists, is not simply nutritional need but the very question of "who and what we are becoming, individually and socially, within the cultures we inhabit" (14). In *Fatty Fatty Boom Boom: A Memoir of Food, Fat, and Family* (2022), this becoming is not a gradual or private process. It is announced, commented upon, and socially adjudicated from the earliest

stages of the narrator's life, well before she herself understands that her body has become a matter of cultural concern. The gaze that will come to structure her relationship with food and with her own flesh does not arrive in adolescence. It arrives in infancy.

The scene that most sharply crystallises this early surveillance occurs when Chaudry's grandfather encounters her as a young child after a period of absence. Having last seen her as an acceptably chubby ten-month-old infant, he now beholds, in her own words, "his worst nightmare: an undeniably and alarmingly fat little girl" (43). The language here is worth pausing over. The distinction that the memoir draws between acceptable chubbiness in infancy and alarming fatness in early childhood is not a distinction of degree alone. It is a distinction of cultural legibility. The chubby infant occupies a recognisable and tolerated position within the social imagination of the Pakistani household, where infant roundness signifies health, abundance, and adequate maternal care. The fat child, by contrast, has exceeded the boundaries of that tolerance and crossed into a different register of meaning entirely, one in which the body is no longer merely a body but a problem requiring explanation. The grandfather's response, directed not at the child but at her mother, "What have you done to her?" (44), makes this interpretive shift explicit. Responsibility for the child's body is assigned to the mother. The female body, even at its most infantile, is already understood as something that must be managed, and its failure to conform is already understood as someone's fault.

Probyn's theorisation of the body as an assemblage connected to "a wide range of social and cultural forces" is illuminating here, precisely because it resists the reduction of bodily experience to individual failure or parental neglect (14). The conditions that produced Chaudry's body in early childhood were multiple and intersecting. Her mother's account of the situation is itself a small archaeology of diasporic circumstance. There was "too much food in America," she explains, cheaper and more accessible than the carefully sourced ingredients of the Pakistani kitchen. There was a neighbouring American family whose children ferried the chubby Pakistani toddler down the hall and fed her "cake, cookies, chips, and Cheetos, all the processed snack food her parents almost never brought into their own home" (44-45). Snacking, as Chaudry observes, was to her parents "a uniquely American phenomenon" (45). In Pakistan, meals followed a structured rhythm of breakfast, lunch, teatime, and dinner. The continuous, unregulated consumption that characterised American domestic life was culturally foreign to them, and yet its effects registered on their daughter's body with unmistakable clarity. The child became, in this sense, the site upon which two food cultures collided, her flesh the most visible evidence of a diasporic negotiation that her parents were themselves only beginning to navigate.

Mannur's insistence that the culinary constitutes "an epistemological device" through which the complex terrain of South Asian American life is navigated, and that diasporic culinary narratives carry within them "a discomfort that palatable accounts of migration tend to flatten," is directly relevant to this dynamic (32, 271). The food that shaped Chaudry's body in early childhood was not Pakistani food, the carefully prepared, freshly sourced, labour-intensive cuisine of Taya Amma's kitchen, but American processed food, consumed outside the home, offered by well-meaning neighbours, and entirely beyond her parents' cultural framework of understanding. What Mannur identifies as the difficulty of theorising food outside the register of what Sara Ahmed calls "happy effects" becomes here a diagnostic tool (271). The happy effects of neighbourly generosity and of a child's pleasure in cake and Cheetos produced consequences that the Pakistani household could only read as failure, excess, and social risk. The body that resulted from this encounter between cultures was not a body anyone had intended to produce. It was the unintended product of diasporic disorientation, of parents overwhelmed by a new food environment they did not yet know how to manage or resist.

It is within this context that the gendered dimension of the surveillance becomes fully legible. Taya Amma's observation, made while bathing the toddler, that she was "shaped just like her father," functioned, as Chaudry's mother immediately recognised, as a poorly disguised insult (44-45). Embedded within this remark was a principle that Chaudry's mother understood with precision. Married women could expand with childbearing, but unmarried girls had no business being fat, and an overweight girl toddler was, in the logic of the Pakistani household, "one large red flag pointing toward future unmarriageability" (44-45). Probyn, drawing on Bourdieu's theorisation of the eating body, observes that taste structures the body along lines of both class and gender, and that the female body is routinely constructed as one that should be "satisfied with a small portion," one that derives a kind of social authority from its own self-restraint (28-29). What Bourdieu identifies as a sociological tendency, Chaudry's memoir renders as a lived and intimate reality. The female child's body is measured not only against standards of health but against standards of future desirability, and its failure to conform carries consequences that are understood to be simultaneously personal and social, familial and cultural.

The father's role in this dynamic introduces a further layer of complexity that the memoir does not allow to remain unexamined. Chaudry's mother laid the blame for her daughter's size on her husband, noting that he was "a passionate eater," someone who loved restaurants, who spent hours feasting with friends, and who lavished his daughter with fast food (45). The father's appetite, unremarkable and even celebrated as a masculine characteristic, becomes transgressive only when it is transmitted to a daughter whose body has no social permission to carry its effects. The same pleasure in food that is indulged in a man becomes, in a girl child, a problem of management and future

consequence. Bourdieu's argument, as Probyn renders it, that "eating is the principle of the division of foods between the sexes," finds here a particularly vivid instantiation (28-29). The father eats freely and is understood as a foodie. The daughter eats with the same appetite and is understood as a flag of social risk.

What is perhaps most significant in Chaudry's account of this early period is the narrator's own obliviousness to the meanings being assigned to her body. She records that until the moment she stepped on a school scale and heard her weight announced aloud to the assembled class, she had not thought of her body as a problem (103). She ate "slowly and deliberately, with what her mother described as the careful attention of a meditation" (53). She was unaware that this absorption in food was being read, by those around her, as a symptom rather than a pleasure. Mannur's argument that South Asian diasporic culinary narratives must be theorised "with vigilance," that food cannot be allowed to contain only happy effects, returns here with particular force (271). The child's pleasure in eating was genuine and uncomplicated. The social meanings accumulating around that pleasure were neither. The gaze had arrived long before the narrator understood she was being watched, and the shame that would eventually attach itself to her body had been quietly prepared by years of familial commentary, cultural expectation, and diasporic anxiety that she was, as yet, entirely unequipped to name or resist.

### **The Body That Goes On Living**

The gendered double standard that structures the Pakistani household's relationship to fat embodiment is nowhere more sharply articulated than in Chaudry's account of the exchange with her uncle Pummy Mamu, himself unmarried and physically unremarkable, who explains with a kind of cheerful cruelty that "men can look like anything as long as they have good jobs and homes, but girls cannot look like middle-aged women before they are even married," that girls should have a "kamar, a waist, not a kamra, an entire room" (101). The wordplay is clever, as Chaudry acknowledges, but its cleverness does not soften its ideological content. What the uncle articulates is not personal prejudice but cultural logic, a logic in which the female body is valued instrumentally, as a prerequisite for the social transaction of marriage, rather than intrinsically, as the site of a person's own experience and selfhood. Susan Bordo's argument that female bodies have historically been "significantly more vulnerable than male bodies to extremes of cultural manipulation," and that the social regulation of the female body constitutes "a central strategy in the maintenance of power relations between the sexes," provides the theoretical framework within which this exchange becomes readable not as a family anecdote but as a structural condition (143). The uncle's remark is not exceptional. It is representative of a broader

cultural architecture in which the fat female body is understood as socially illegible, unmarriageable, and therefore without value.

It is this architecture that Chaudry carries into her first marriage, and it is within that marriage that its most destructive consequences become visible. Chaudry records that throughout the relationship her husband AK and his family made her weight "the subject of persistent ridicule and torment," and that the most damaging thing AK ever said to her was not a blow but a sentence: the suggestion, delivered in response to her threat to leave, that "no man would want her," that her body placed her beyond the reach of desirability or economic independence (302). The effect of this sustained assault was not, as the cultural logic of discipline might predict, a motivation toward thinness. It was the opposite. As Chaudry observes with precision, "the thing he loathed became the thing she loathed," and her body did not shrink from that loathing but grew, "expanding with pain, bloated with self-loathing and humiliation, until she weighed more than she ever had" (302). Bordo's analysis of the relationship between cultural contempt for the fat body and the psychic conditions that produce disordered eating is directly illuminating here. "Psychopathology," she argues, drawing on Jules Henry, "is the final outcome of all that is wrong with a culture," and the epidemic proportions of eating disorders among women in contemporary Western societies are "not superficial fashion phenomena but reflections of the central pathologies of a culture that has instilled in women a profound dread of their own appetites" (140). What Chaudry's body registers in the years of her first marriage is precisely this dread, turned inward and expressed not through restriction but through excess, through an eating that is no longer nourishment or pleasure but the corporeal symptom of accumulated shame.

This is where Probyn's theorisation of shame and disgust as bodily forces that cannot simply be expelled or resolved becomes indispensable to the analysis. Probyn observes that "we do not know what a shameful, shamed, disgusted, or disgusting body can do," and that "we lose something important when we erase the dynamics of shame and disgust from our theoretical frameworks" (145). The attempt to erase them is precisely what Chaudry undertakes in the period of disordered eating that precedes and accompanies her first marriage: the attempts at bulimia, the laxatives, the fad diets, the eventual bariatric surgery (240, 338). Each of these constitutes an effort to resolve shame through the body, to make the exterior conform to a standard that might finally silence the cultural commentary that has accompanied her since infancy. Yet Bordo's account of the anorectic and bulimic subject, "haunted by hunger and in constant dread of being overwhelmed by appetite, of giving in to biological urge and the craving that is never satisfied," describes the precise psychological terrain that Chaudry inhabits during these years (146). The body that she attempts to discipline through restriction and purging is not a body that has failed to understand the cultural message. It is a body that has

understood it too completely, internalised it so thoroughly that the message has become indistinguishable from selfhood. Where Bordo reads this condition as cultural pathology, Probyn reads it as the body's visceral attempt to process what shame has done to it, to find through eating and its refusal "some gut-level reckoning with who and what one is becoming" (14). Together, these frameworks illuminate what neither can capture alone: that Chaudry's disordered relationship with food during these years is simultaneously a symptom of cultural imposition and a form of embodied negotiation, a body trying, however self-destructively, to work something out.

The departure from AK's house marks a turning point in the memoir, though not the triumphant one that recovery narratives typically stage. Chaudry observes that she had already lost "a hundred and sixty pounds of baggage and regret" the night she left, and that the subsequent months of treadmill running, to the beat of bhangra, rhythm and blues, and Sufi folk music, produced a feeling she identifies not as discipline but as freedom, a sense that "the stronger her body became the more her spirit healed" (303). What is significant here is not the weight loss itself but the conditions under which physical movement becomes pleasurable rather than punitive. For the first time, the body is exercised for the self rather than for the cultural verdict. The gym becomes, like the corner where the child once sat with her carefully carried plate and her own bib, a space of private sovereignty. Yet Mannur's insistence that diasporic culinary narratives must be theorised "with vigilance," that the discomfort lodged within palatable accounts of migration and its aftermath cannot be allowed to be flattened into happy effects, requires that the apparent resolution of this moment be held carefully (271). The healing is real. It is also incomplete, and the memoir knows this.

The second marriage to Irfan, a man who has himself struggled with weight his entire life, introduces into the narrative a new register of culinary intimacy that is markedly different from the alimentary dynamics of the first marriage and the family household of childhood. Food here becomes a language of mutual recognition rather than of surveillance and judgment. The couple bond over shared histories of fat embodiment, exchange diet hacks and weight loss strategies, and indulge in the pleasures of late-night ice cream and carefully made chai in ways that transform eating from a site of shame into a site of tenderness (318). Irfan's chai making, "laborious and devotional, simmered low and slow with cardamom and loose-leaf tea and whole milk reduced to malai," becomes a form of care that Chaudry initially mocks and eventually comes to understand as an act of love expressed through culinary patience (318). That the two subsequently gain significant weight together in the first months of their marriage is recorded without apology or excessive commentary (316). The observation that "two food addicts moving in together after over a year of discipline and deprivation could only go one way" is delivered with a wry clarity that refuses to moralize. Probyn's understanding of eating as a site of assemblage, through which individuals produce themselves and are produced anew in relation to

others and to their social worlds, finds here one of its most honest instantiations: a fat woman and a fat man, eating together, granting each other "quiet permission," as Chaudry puts it, to "just give in and be" (319).

It is in the memoir's engagement with body positivity discourse, however, that its most theoretically significant move is made. When Chaudry's visible weight loss attracts social media criticism on the grounds that she is undermining fat positivity and demonising fat people, her response refuses both the cultural imperative toward thinness and the activist imperative toward acceptance. "It feels as oppressive," she writes, "when someone insists she feel good about herself as she is, as it has felt when others insisted she feel bad" (361). Charlotte Cooper's argument that there are many who would prefer fat people not to exist, but that fat people are here regardless of whether they are allowed or supposed to be, and that "fat existence is valuable in itself," provides the political framework within which Chaudry's refusal can be understood (2). Yet Cooper's own insistence on ambivalence and on the exhaustion that underlies fat activism also speaks to something that the memoir renders with particular honesty: the sheer fatigue of having one's body be a site of permanent cultural contest, whether the contest is waged by those who demand thinness or those who demand self-love (98). LeBesco's observation that fat people exist in a condition of liminality, "neither fully in the centre nor fully at the margin, betwixt and between the positions assigned by law, custom, and convention," illuminates the position that Chaudry occupies at the memoir's close (27). She is not thin. She is not unreservedly fat positive. She is something harder to categorise and, the memoir suggests, something more honest: a woman who has lived inside her body long enough to know that no external framework, whether of shame or of celebration, is adequate to what that living has actually been.

The return to Pakistan that punctuates the memoir's later sections carries this complexity into its explicitly diasporic register. Chaudry describes the feeling of touching down in a place that "has never been her home but feels more like home than any place she has ever lived," where "the air, the sounds, the smells, and the people all seem like hers, everything familiar, all of it a comfort," and where a part of her feels "as though it has never left" (272). That this homecoming is also a site of renewed bodily scrutiny, where a mother-in-law's first words upon seeing her after weeks apart are an observation that she has "gotten even fatter" (263), does not cancel the comfort. It complicates it, in the way that the memoir consistently complicates everything: by refusing to allow any experience to be only one thing. The diasporic body, as Brah has argued, carries "specific historical trajectories and material circumstances that constitute the very substance of its difference" (102). For Chaudry, that body is fat, Pakistani, American, divorced, remarried, maternal, and finally, provisionally, her own. The table at which she eventually arrives, hosting dinner parties and ladies' lunches and teas and barbecues, praised for her koftay and goat shorba and cholay and chicken pulao, basking in the same culinary recognition

that her mother once sought, is not the table of resolution (319). It is the table of continuance, the place where the story of the diasporic female body, fed and watched and shamed and nourished and finally, imperfectly, inhabited, goes on being told.

## Conclusion

*Fatty Fatty Boom Boom: A Memoir of Food, Fat, and Family* (2022) ultimately refuses the consolations that both cultural shame and body-positive celebration offer as resolutions to the fat female diasporic body. What Chaudry's memoir demonstrates, through the very form of alimentary memoir, is that food does not simply nourish or wound. It assembles. The kitchen floor that constitutes Taya Amma's throne, the shorba dispatched as competitive proof of domestic worth, the late-night chai made with devotional patience, and the cholay praised at a dinner table the narrator has finally made her own are not sequential episodes in a recovery arc but simultaneous registers of a body that has never been only one thing. Read through Probyn's theorisation of alimentary assemblages, Mannur's insistence on diasporic culinary vigilance, and Bordo's feminist critique of female hunger as culturally regulated pathology, the fat South Asian diasporic female body emerges not as a problem awaiting resolution but as a living site where the pressures of kinship, migration, gender, and appetite converge without resolving. The memoir's refusal to moralize, neither celebrating weight loss nor demanding self-love, is finally its most theoretically honest gesture. What remains when shame, surveillance, and nourishment are held in sustained tension is not recovery but inhabitation: a woman, imperfectly at home in her body, continuing to eat.

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